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WORLD 8
DUTY CUT ON SMARTPHONE PARTS TO HIT ELECTRONICS ECOSYSTEM: GTRI

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Mid-week polls in Delhi on Feb 5

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With an announcement of the 70 assembly seats in Delhi in a single phase on February 5 and the votes will be counted on February 8 by the Election Commission (EC), the stage is set for a fierce triangular contest between the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Congress. The battle lines are drawn between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's developmental model versus the 'freebies' model touted by the AAP chief and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is eyeing a hat-trick, having swept the 2015 and 2020 elections with 67 and 62 seats, respectively. The AAP faces anti-incumbency, corruption allegations and an aggressive BJP in its bid to assume power for a third successive term. The Congress will be keen to regain the national Capital. Although the Congress and the AAP contested the 2024 Lok Sabha elections together as part of the INDIA bloc, they will be competing separately in the upcoming Assembly polls. Announcing the dates for the Assembly polls in Delhi, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said "It is a single-phase election... We have deliberately kept polling on a Wednesday so more people come out to vote... like we did in Maharashtra. The entire election process will be completed by February 10." With the EC's announcement of the election schedule, the



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu during a press conference for the announcement of the schedule for the Delhi Assembly elections. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is now in effect and will remain so until the conclusion of the polls. The last date to file nominations is January 17 and the scrutiny of nominations will be done by January 18. Candidates will be able to withdraw their nominations till January 20. Of the 70 seats in Delhi, 58 are general and 12 reserved. According to the electoral roll, Delhi has 1.55 crore voters -- 83.49 lakh men, 71.74 lakh women and 1,261 transgender persons. There are 25.89 lakh young voters, 2.08 lakh first-time voters, and 830 above the age of 100, Kumar said. More than 13,000 polling stations will be set up in Delhi, he said. Kumar has urged candidates and political party leaders to refrain from making remarks against women and involving children during poll campaigns. He was asked

EC CAUTIONS CABINET ON DELHI BUDGET PROVISIONS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission will write to the cabinet secretary, informing that no Delhi-specific provision can be made in the Union Budget that can disturb the level-playing field, CEC Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday. Polling for the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8. Responding to a query about the the Union Budget, scheduled days ahead of the polls, Kumar said, "We will write to the cabinet secretary that no Delhi-specific provision can be made in the Union Budget that can disturb the level-playing field."

about the recent comment made by BJP leader Ramesh Bidhuri against Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. In 2020, the elections were announced on January 6, polling was held on February 8, and votes were counted on February 11. The 70-member Assembly's term concludes on February 23, necessitating elections before that to form a new House. Except for the Lok Sabha polls last year when AAP and Congress joined hands and together got an impressive vote share of 43.1%, the two parties-despite having a similar vote bank-have always contested separately. However, while AAP's vote share, since its maiden election in 2013, was constantly on the higher side, the number of people voting for Congress decreased significantly in the last decade.

India boosts surveillance for HMPV

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the detection of cases of human metapneumovirus (HMPV) infection in Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Centre has advised States to step up surveillance for respiratory illnesses including ILI and SARI to tackle any exigency, and create awareness about the prevention of transmission of the pathogen which is fast spreading in China. Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava on Monday chaired a virtual meeting with states and union territories to take stock of respiratory illnesses and HMPV cases in the country and public health measures for their management, a health ministry statement said. However, the Centre has not issued any advisory yet. The Union Health Secretary said that there is no cause of concern for the public as HMPV has been present



globally since 2001, the statement said, adding that States have been asked to strengthen and review the ILI/SARI surveillance. "The States have been advised to enhance information, education and communication (IEC) and awareness among people regarding the prevention of transmission of the virus with simple measures such as washing hands often with soap and water; not touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; avoiding close

contact with people exhibiting symptoms of the disease; and covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing," said the statement. HMPV is a globally recognised respiratory virus. It is a viral pathogen that causes respiratory infections in people of all age groups. During the meeting, it was noted that the IDSP data does not indicate any unusual rise in influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illnesses (SARI) cases anywhere in the country. All the detected patients don't have any foreign travel history, suggesting that the virus is indigenous. This is also corroborated by the ICMR sentinel surveillance data, it said. Srivastava reiterated that an increase in respiratory illnesses is usually seen during the winter months and that the country is well prepared for any potential surge in such cases, the statement said.

CM launches double-decker buses

Hop-On Hop-Off & SJTA e-buses also introduced

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

To enhance urban mobility and promote sustainable transportation, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi launched the State's first-ever double-decker bus service along with the launch of the Hop-On Hop-Off buses and Shree Jagannatha Temple Administration (SJTA) e-bus services at the Mo Bus Depot in Gadakana, Bhubaneswar on Tuesday. A total of five double-decker



buses, ten Hop-On Hop-Off and 25 SJTA e-bus will ply in the Capital Region. The double-decker buses will operate in Bhubaneswar, Puri, Cuttack and Khordha. The Hop-On Hop-Off buses will cover key tourist destinations in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. This service is de-

equipped with ramps to accommodate passengers using wheelchairs. Two individuals with wheelchairs were among the first passengers, and the Chief Minister personally handed them the first two tickets for the bus. The double-decker buses will operate as an express service with fares ranging from a minimum of Rs 30 to a maximum of Rs 170. The Hop-On Hop-Off (HOHO) bus service will offer a one-day pass priced at Rs 200, allowing unlimited travel on any route within the HOHO network. As part of an introductory offer, the 50 card fee will be waived until January 31.

PWD withdraws Atishi's bungalow allotment



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a twist to the ongoing row over Delhi chief minister's official residence at 6, Flag Staff Road at Civil Lines, the Public Works Department (PWD) has withdrawn its offer to allot the bungalow to Chief Minister Atishi, as she did not take "physical possession" of the house

despite multiple requests from the department and issuance of "authority slip" last October. Countering her claim that she was evicted from her official residence for the second time in three months, PWD's sources have said that the question of eviction doesn't arise because she never took possession of the bungalow. The PWD has now offered two choices of

accommodation to Atishi - Bungalow 2 at 8 Raj Niwas and Bungalow 115 at Ansari Road Daryaganj - and asked her to submit her choice within eight days. "A night before the announcement of the election date, the BJP-led government at the Centre has thrown me out of the chief minister's residence for the second time in two months. I was sent a letter stating that the allotment had been cancelled. The residence has been snatched from the elected chief minister of an elected government. They did the same thing three months ago, when I became chief minister. My belongings and those of my family were thrown out of the house and on the road," the chief minister said in Hindi. In a letter dated January 6,

the PWD letter indicates that Atishi has not been evicted, as she never took possession of the bungalow that was allocated to her. Secondly, her official residence at 17 AB Mathura Road remains allocated to her, and she has been offered two other bungalows to choose from. The letter from the PWD also clarified that the withdrawal of the offer for the Flag Staff Road bungalow occurred for two main reasons: Atishi failed to take possession of the property within the required one-week period, despite it being offered three months earlier. Secondly, the 'Sheesh Mahal', where the bungalow is located, is currently under investigation by the CBI, ED, and CAG, due to concerns over potential corruption related to its construction.

BBSR all set for Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Delegates arrive for Jan 8-10 mega event

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Thousands of Indian diaspora from across several parts of the globe have started arriving in Bhubaneswar to attend the mega Pravasi Bharatiya Divas scheduled to begin on Wednesday. The delegates are getting a glimpse of the vibrant culture of Odisha as elaborate arrangements are in place to welcome them at the Biju Patnaik International Airport. On-site visuals showed the guests being greeted with lotus flowers on their arrival



while a band of artists performed Odia folk music and dances outside the airport terminal gates. "I cannot express how happy I feel to be here. It feels like a big family reunion," said a participant from France. Outside the airport, the city has been decked up with an intense attention to detail. Walls are adorned with traditional Odia paintings while

gears up to host its first-ever Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. Over 4,000 delegates from 70 countries are expected to participate in the event, which will be held at the Janata Maidan from January 8 to 10. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the Indian diaspora and inaugurate a theme pavilion on January 9. President Droupadi Murmu is also expected to attend the mega event on the concluding day. To ensure an incident-free experience, the Odisha Police has tightened security measures with the deployment of dedicated teams of the Special Forces taking charge of key junctions.

KALINGA INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY (KIIT)
Deemed to be University
(Established U/S 3 of UGC Act 1956), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

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MINATI

CYCLING VELODROME, KIIT & KISS

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Ms. Minati Mohapatra, the first Arjuna Awardee from Odisha (Cycling)

Date: 8th January 2025 | Time: 4.00P.M. | Venue: KIIT & KISS Campus, Bhubaneswar

KALINGA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (KISS)
Deemed to be University
(Established U/S 3 of UGC Act 1956), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Inauguration by
Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya
Hon'ble Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment, Govt. of India

► KIIT & KISS is proud to have created World-Class Sports Infrastructure in multiple disciplines

► All stadiums are approved by their respective National Sports Bodies

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► Football Stadium

► Rugby Ground

► Tennis Complex

► Indoor Volleyball Court

► Shooting Range

► Hockey Stadium

► Athletics Stadium

► Badminton Complex

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► KIIT- Biju Patnaik Multipurpose Indoor Stadium

► Archery Stadium

KIIT is only 27 years old as an institute (1997 - 2024) and 21 years old as a university

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2 BJP leaders' death in mishap Police take Hyva driver on 3-day remand

PNS ■ BARGARH
In the wake of the fatal road accident in Kantapali in Sambalpur district, the Hyva driver alleged to be responsible for the deaths of two BJP leaders of Bargarh district was taken to remand by the Sambalpur police on Tuesday. The accused Prasanna Jenamani, whose inconsistent statements have raised suspicions, would be subjected to custodial interrogation for three days as police seek to uncover the truth. The court of Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC) authorised a three-day custody period following an initial request for

seven days by the Burla police. The cops are delving into the potential motives behind the incident. Key questions include whether the driver acted independently or if others were involved. There are also concerns that the BJP leaders may have been targeted due to their opposition to illegal fly ash shipments or other reasons yet to be clarified. Earlier on Monday, police had confirmed that a dumper "intentionally" hit the vehicle of two BJP leaders. The two deceased, identified as BJP's Goshala mandal president Debendra Nayak and former Sarpanch

Muralidhar Chhuria, were killed after the dumper hit their car in the early hours of Sunday. The incident happened around 1.30 am on NH-53 in the Burla police station area. There were six people in the car, including the driver, and they were returning home in Kardola from Bhubaneswar. "The video footage of the incident we have collected shows that the dumper intentionally hit the car. So, we have registered a case under Sections 307 and 302 of BNS. We are collecting other scientific evidence," Sambalpur SP P Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo said.

No need to panic over HMPV in State



No case detected, says Minister Mahaling

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
In the wake of the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) infections in parts of the country, the Odisha Government on Tuesday stated that there

is no need to panic for the people as no cases of infection have been reported from the State. "Nobody has been affected by HMPV infections in the State so far. Hence, people should not panic. The Health Department is fully ready to tackle any kind of eventualities arising out of it. Whatever guidelines and standard operating procedure will be issued by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to curb the infection, Odisha will strictly adhere to it," said Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling. "I have already spoken with all the medical colleges in the State in this regard. Special teams of doctors are fully prepared for the treatment of the infection. If any kind of dire situation occurs, it will be jointly dealt with by the State and the Centre," he said. "If anybody suffers from cough, cold and fever, they should come to the hospital for primary treatment. We are fully ready for the sample tests. HMPV infection cases have been negligible across the country so far," said Mahaling.



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who is in Odisha to attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention, visits the Konark Sun Temple on Tuesday.

In Balangir Animals, birds sacrificed at Sulia Jatra

SUDHIR MISHRA ■ BALANGIR

Sulia Jatra, characterised by historic customs, saw the sacrifice of a significant number of animals and birds at Khairaguda and Kururia villages under Deogaon block in Balangir district on Tuesday. Villagers from the region assembled in large numbers bearing traditional arms to participate in a vibrant procession culminating in these rituals. Sulia Peetha, a revered site, became the epicentre for these ceremonial sacrifices. Animals including goats and sheep and poultry were offered as part of the customary rituals observed with no formal restrictions this year. Sulia Pitha is



an open place situated on a hilltop surrounded by a picturesque landscape and a large water reservoir. "Thousands of birds and animals like cock, pigeon, fowl, goat and sheep were sacrificed at Bada Khala and Nua Khala of Sulia Pitha," said an eyewitness. "People in the area have a lot of faith and belief in the festival. They celebrate it with a lot of devotion to fulfill their wishes," said a local denizen. As per their belief, it is an act of gratitude to the deity and meant to pay back the debt after the fulfilment of their wishes.

In city IT Dept raids fraudster couple's properties



Hansita, Anil possess fortune worth crores
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Income Tax Department officials conducted simultaneous raids at 12 locations, including Bhubaneswar, Delhi and Jharkhand, linked with arrested fraudster couple Hansita Abhilipsa and Anil Mohanty. The couple is accused of impersonating as relatives (daughter and son-in-law) of the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary PK Mishra to dupe rich businessmen and amassing a fortune worth crores of rupees. Raids were carried out at Hansita's residence and office at Patia, Bhubaneswar, where the IT officials are scrutinising account transactions. Reports suggest that Hansita purchased luxury cars without loans, raising suspicions about her unaccounted money. The case involves the

acquisition of high-value assets, including cash and luxury vehicles, allegedly without transparent financial backing. The raids aim to unearth details of financial irregularities and trace the source of funds. Authorities are continuing their investigation to determine the extent of tax evasion and other possible violations. IT officials entered Hansita's office in Ragunathpur by breaking the locks and seized many incriminating documents. Hansita and Anil were making illegal deals worth crores of rupees and conspiring to dupe people from here. Meanwhile, the special crime unit of the Commissionerate police has been continuing its probe into the allegations against Hansita and Anil about amassing properties. As per sources, Directorate of Enforcement is also likely to investigate into the cheating cases in this regard soon.

Finance Dept seeks inputs for Annual Budget '25-'26

Latest by Jan 31
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government sought suggestions and inputs from common men, civil society organisations and different advocacy groups for preparation of the Annual Budget 2025-26. The Finance Department has been holding pre-budget consultation with the cross section of the society. In order

to make the budgetary process more open and participative using Information and Communication Technology, the department has sought public opinion for the last few years through e-mail, SMS and Whatsapp. The Finance Department invited suggestions through the webpage, budget.odisha.gov.in, to be used as input for preparation of Annual Budget 2025-26.

The suggestions can also be mailed at odisha.budget@gov.in. Similarly, suggestions for the budget are also invited through Whatsapp to mobile number (+91)9438161111 and X (@FdOdisha), facebook (@FinanceOdisha) and Instagram (@fdodisha). This facility will be available till January 31, officials said. "Members of the public, civil society organisation, ad-

vocacy groups and other stakeholders are requested to make use of this unique opportunity to participate in the budget making process of the State Government," the department appealed. The Finance Department had received tremendous public response in past years. The State Finance Department also used many of the inputs while preparing the Annual Budget, official sources said.

RBI conducts financial literacy prog for blind



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A Financial Literacy and Awareness Programme for the visually impaired persons was organised by the Reserve Bank of India, Bhubaneswar here on January 4 on the occasion of the International Braille Day. Deputy General Manager, RBI Madhukar Anand, Deputy Secretary, SSEPD, Odisha Sanyasi Behera, Chairman, Child and Women Development Society, Bhubaneswar Major (Dr) Kalpana Das, OAB president Maheswar Rout and

vice president Hemsagar Panigrahi inaugurated the event. The DGM RBI welcomed the participants and delivered the keynote address. The officials from RBI Binod Kumar Das and Aruna Kumar Satapathy took sessions covering various topics such as financial planning, savings, investment, insurance, special provisions for the visually impaired persons viz. MANI App, note identification features, accessible ATMs and priority privilege at bank branches etc. The participants were also

informed about various frauds and sensitized not to share the financial information with anyone. The grievance redressal mechanism of RBI and procedure for lodging complaints were also informed to the participants. Around 180 participants including students, employees, members and office bearers of the association attended the programme. Financial Awareness Messages (FAME) booklets of RBI translated in Braille script were distributed among the participants.

Samanta gets 1st PIO Excellence Award



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
With the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas kicking off here on Wednesday, the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) has honoured founder of KIIT and KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta with the first-ever PIO Excellence Award in recognition of his contributions to education and tribal empowerment. The award was given away during the 'PIOs Dialogue

with India 2025' session organised by KIIT-DU. Themed "Empowering Global Connections: The Role of PIOs in Emerging India", the programme brought together dignitaries and leaders from around the world. Alongside Dr Samanta, Shanmugan Mookkan, OSD to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, and Professor Ajay Kumar Dubey from JNU were also recognised for their contributions. The session also marked

the launch of the GOPIO International Chair at KIIT-DU, an initiative dedicated to promoting research and innovation concerning the Indian diaspora. This chair will facilitate academic studies and document the contributions of PIOs across the globe. Dr. Samanta, in his speech, expressed his gratitude, saying, "KIIT has grown from 12 students to over 80,000 today, and KISS has become a revolution in the country."

Love for flora and fauna K'pada engineer turns home into mini zoo

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA
In a world where forging human connections is increasingly difficult, some individuals find solace in nature's creations. One such person is Rashmi Ranjan Senapati, an engineer from Gop village in Kendrapada district, who has transformed his home into a captivating mini zoo which is garnering admiration from locals and visitors alike. The innovative engineer, a B.Tech graduate, has opened his home to more than 30 species of exotic birds. Among the treasured collection are rare species such as Love Birds, Lorikeets, Blue Monk Parrots and Cockatiels. The birds' vibrant colours and melodious sounds bring a new charm to



his home. Rashmi's passion for wildlife does not stop at birds. He also has set up an aquarium housing vivid fish and lush seaweed. Furthermore, his collection of foreign-breed dogs is a major attraction in his house. This extensive project requires considerable financial investment, which Rashmi manages alongside his

job in a private firm. Beyond the rich avian life, Rashmi's garden boasts an impressive collection of 150 different plant species, including exotic varieties like Pansalvia and Snake Dragon. "I'm at inner peace when I see them and spend time with them. There is no better joy than loving my pets," said Rashmi.

Rashmi's wife Kalyani, who provides unwavering support to his venture, said, "At first, we brought home a couple of birds. He was so pleased with the chirping of the birds that he decided to turn our home into a mini zoo. Every morning, just after waking up, he goes to spend time with them. I have also fallen in love with the birds and the animals."

'Life Skills Management' talk held at IIT BBS



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A five-day faculty development programme (FDP) 'Life Skills Management' organised at the IIT Bhubaneswar concluded on January 3. Chief Speaker of the inaugural ceremony Madhusmita Sahoo, IAS, set the FDP in motion highlighting the significance of emotional intelligence for navigating personal as well as professional lives. Citing theories and instances from varied disciplines like psychology, philosophy and literature,

she laid the foundation for the enriching sessions that followed. The first session was addressed by Swami Maheshatmanandaji (Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar), who introduced the concept of life skills along with the need for life skills management. Sessions on Time Management and Ethics and Responsibility were taken by Lt Col (Dr) Soumya Prakash Otta and IPS officer Sagarika Nath wherein personal experiences of the resource persons infused life into

the concepts disseminated to the participants. Dr Anup Kelgaonkar's session on Curiosity put forth intriguing case studies of patients with complaints of regular concerns until the doctor probed further to discover serious health conditions. Prof Anand Pradhan of IIMC, Dhenakal highlighted the inevitability of social and cultural competence in order to be able to empathise and accept individual differences and varied viewpoints. A session on ethical decision-making was taken by Dr Rajesh

Panda who referred to various case studies on the intricacies of the said topic. Practical sessions of stress management through yoga saw enthusiastic involvement by the participants. A special session on Pedagogy, Teaching and Learning was taken by Prof Shreepad Karmalkar, Director, IIT Bhubaneswar. He highlighted the indicators of student learning, factors which influence this learning, the role of teachers among these factors and the role of activities and mistakes in learning.

Incidents of attack in Baleswar Christians submit memo for Guv seeking protection

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■
BALESWAR
The functionaries of Christian community of the district on Monday submitted a memorandum to the Governor Dr Kambhampati Hari Babu through the district Collector expressing their concern over the growing attacks on their community members and urging him to take remedial measures to curb the menace.

churches and homes were experienced by them. The rising hostility, which is reported each month across the State, threatened not only their places of worship but also their ability to practise their beliefs without fear. Further, there were cases in which individuals were coerced to recite chants such as 'Jai Shri Ram' against their will. "Our Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and the right to practise our faith without prosecution. However, the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that has

developed undermines these rights. It is imperative that all citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs be allowed to live harmoniously and express their faith freely," they said. They further urged to ensure protection of minority rights, upholding the rule of law and establishing measures that enhance interfaith dialogue and understanding across the State. The memorandum pertaining to their issues and concerns was also dispatched to other concerned departments.

Probe DMF irregularities in Keonjhar: HC

PNS ■ **CUTTACK**
Coming down heavily on the alleged irregularities and corruption in the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) Trust fund in Keonjhar district, the Orissa High Court has directed the State-level committee to investigate and take appropriate action in the matter. Key allegations include discrepancies in tenders, massive corruption in release of funds, failure to provide utilisation certificates and disbursement of advance payments to contractors. Other accusations involve executing projects without the Trust Board's approval, over-spending on project

estimates, irregularities in DMF bank account funds, unauthorised appointments and irregularities in contingency grants. A Bench comprising Chief Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh and Justice Savitri Rath issued the directions based on Section 15(4) and 9B of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and Rule 18(B) of the Odisha DMF Rules, 2015. The court also directed the government to furnish relevant documents and counters for the committee's examination. The State-level committee that has the State Chief Secretary as the chairperson would submit its findings and determine the nature of actions to be

taken, the Bench said. The court said it would decide on the necessity of further intervention after reviewing the investigation's outcome. Initial complaints regarding these issues were submitted to the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary, Planning and Coordination Department and Keonjhar Collector. Following inaction, the case was filed in the High Court on October 22, 2024. Subsequently, the DMF Chairperson and the Keonjhar Collector were served notices, with a response filed on November 27, 2024. The High Court has scheduled the next hearing for March 6.

Student stabs classmate in Baleswar

PNS ■ **BALESWAR**
A Class-IX student allegedly stabbed his classmate with a knife at the Kamarda Nodal High School in Baleswar district on Monday over some dispute. The incident occurred during the school's annual function. The victim, who sustained severe injuries, has been admitted to a hospital in a critical condition. Sources said there was some disagreement between both the students over some issue which later escalated into a physical confrontation. It was suspected that the attack may have been premedi-

tated with one student allegedly using a knife to target the other. Getting information, the Kamarda police reached the spot and started an investigation into the incident. Teachers and school staffs are cooperating with the police to ensure a thorough probe. The incident has sparked concern among parents and local residents about the safety of students in schools. Earlier a month back, a 14-year-old student of a government-run school under the Pattamundai police station in Kendrapada district had allegedly stabbed his classmate with a knife.

In Keonjhar Finance Co staff mowed down with jeep

Accused loanee detained
PNS ■ **KEONJHAR**
A finance company staff died and another was injured after they were mowed down by a person deliberately with a jeep at Sukra Sahi under the Nayakote police station in Keonjhar district on Monday. The deceased was identified as Tarini Mohanta of Banaekala village under the Sadar police station and the injured as Manoj Mohanta.



When they were returning, Ram Singh chased them with his jeep and mowed them down. While Tarini died at the spot, Manoj was shifted to a hospital with critical injuries. Getting information, police rushed to the spot and sent the body for postmortem and detained Ram Singh for investigations.

Crime-free Balangir Joint meet of police, women outfit, leaders held

SUDHIR MISHRA ■ **BALANGIR**
As a step towards fulfilling the poll promise of safety of women and children and a crime free Balangir, MLA Kalikesh Singh Deo on Saturday addressed a joint meeting of police and Mahila Suraksha Samiti, comprising women's group and other representatives, including Chairman of Balangir Municipality Lika Sahu and ZP Chairperson Devaki Sahu.



istration was held. These members would appraise their problems to the district police and administration so that law and order and other problems would be addressed immediately," said Singh Deo. CCTV surveillance in the city would be strengthened further. Every month, this type

of meeting with police would be held and women can directly raise concern/problems which would be addressed quickly, besides ensuring better coordination between police and public, he added. "Today was the first meeting of Balangir Mahila Surakhya Samiti with us. We

appraised them about our steps, like CCTV surveillance, night patrolling, bike patrolling with siren, and dial-112 facility to ensure a crime free Balangir. Moreover our drive against the anti-socials would continue like the last year," said Balangir SP Rishikesh Khilari.

Rs 30K loan for small biz in Ganjam

Banks asked to disburse needy by Mar
PNS ■ **BRAHMAMPUR**
To discuss the disbursement of loans aimed at promoting small businesses, a meeting was held on Friday under the chairmanship of district Collector Dibya Jyoti Parida at the Ganjam Zilla Parishad hall in Chhatrapur. The loans, offering up to Rs 30,000 at a 4-per cent simple interest rate, are available for families with an annual income of less than Rs 50,000. Applications for the loan can be submitted from January 1 to 25.

Collector Parida directed banks to ensure the loans are disbursed by the end of March. The initiative is designed to help financially vulnerable families establish or expand small businesses, contributing to their social and economic upliftment. Additional District Magistrate Dr Pramod Kumar welcomed the participants, highlighting the importance of the programme for the poor and very poor in the district. Other officials present included the District Social Welfare Officer, Mission Shakti Project Coordinator, Group Development Officers, CDPOs, and Lead Bank Managers.

OJU condemns scribe's murder

Demand for Press Protection Act gains steam
PNS ■ **BHUBANESWAR**
The barbaric killing of senior journalist Mukesh Chandrakar in Bijapur, near the Malkangiri-Chhattisgarh border, has sent shockwaves across the nation. Chandrakar's recent report exposing the substandard quality of road construction worth crores in the Bijapur region had sparked an investigation by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The investigation corroborated his claims, revealing alarming irregularities. Tragically, the act of courage came at a heavy price.

Missing since January 1, Chandrakar's body was discovered in the septic tank of a developer's residence during a police raid. The journalistic fraternity has reacted with fury and grief. In Bhubaneswar, president of the Odisha Journalists Union, Bhubaneswar unit Sarat Chandra Behera, expressed deep anguish, calling it "a black day for journalism." Behera, along with other senior journalists, demanded immediate action against the perpetrators and a thorough investigation to ensure justice for Chandrakar and his grieving family. The tragedy has reignited calls for the immediate implementation of a Press Protection Act.

Litterateur Amiya Bala passes away



PNS ■ **BRAHMAMPUR**
Former president of Kalinga Sahitya Samaj, Odisha Sahitya Akademi awardee, writer and eminent Odia poet Amiya Bala Patnaik breathed her at the age of 78. On her sad demise, a void was created in Odia poetry and translation. She was under treatment for illness for the last few days. She was Principal of Blind School and an educationist of repute. She got many prizes

and awards for her high standard literature, writing and translation in Odia. She was associated with SFI during her student career. Until death she fought against injustice and vehemently protested against all irregularities. Kalinga Sahitya Samaj, CPM State secretary Alli Kishore Patnaik, district secretary Yudhishtir Behera, farmer leader Gopalpur Panigrahi and union leader Pratap Choudhary visited her house and paid their last respects to her.

Govt to resolve all issues in health sector: Min



PNS ■ **BOUDH**
The issue of vacant doctor post will be sorted out in all hospitals across the State as our government is committed to eliminating all the problems in the health sector, said Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling. He was addressing a meeting organised by Dimal Samaj Masinagora Center on the third day of the 2nd Maa Maheshwari Festival at Kantamal Block in Boudh district. Kantamal MLA Kanhai Charan Dang, BJP district president Vipra Charan Mohanty, Zilla Parishad Member Rakesh Kumar Tripathi, Youth BJP leader

Om Prakash Mishra, Dimal Samaj president Gobardhan Pradhan and secretary Anant Kheti, among others attended the meeting. On the occasion, a voluntary blood donation and free health check-up camp was organised in collaboration with Masinagora Dimal Society and Maa Maheshwari Sena. Minister Mahaling, who attended the camp as the chief guest and inaugurated it. A total of 45 units of blood were collected. The camp was organised under the supervision of Dr Mahendra Soe, Medical Officer of Manmunda Group Health Center and Dr Jagdish Sethi, Medical Officer of Kantamal Hospital.

Road safety Rath rolls out in JSpur



To create awareness
PNS ■ **JAGATSINGHPUR**
Commemorating the National Road Safety Month, Additional District Magistrate Sambit Kumar Rout and RTO Jagatsinghpur Nirmal Mohanty jointly flagged off an awareness Rath from the SK Academy School premises here on Thursday. The awareness Rath, equipped with an LED screen,

is set to cover the Panchayats, villages of all blocks and municipal areas in Jagatsinghpur district educating citizens, especially school and college students and youths about road safety rules and accident prevention. The National Road Safety Month observed from January 1 is meant to propagate the cause of safer roads and responsible behaviors for all. The initiative aims to unite all stakeholders, road users, and the public through vari-

ous events and activities, said RTO Mohanty while inaugurating the Rath. With increasing population, and massive urbanisation, road safety is a huge responsibility. Today the number of vehicles on the roads has increased leading to rise in accidents. The endeavors of Road Safety Month is to achieve the target of reduction of road accident deaths and injuries in the district, ADM Rout added.

The Rath will disseminate crucial information about traffic rules and accident prevention, emphasizing the importance of wearing helmets with riding two-wheelers, and seat belts while driving four-wheelers, urging drivers to adhere to traffic rules, the RTO said. Among others, educationist Dr Surendra Tripathy, headmaster Ramakanta Pati, science supervisor Jiban Kumar Sahoo, and Red Cross officer Trilochan Sahoo spoke.

Prog at DAV Pokhariput Importance of balanced diet underscored



PNS ■ **BHUBANESWAR**
Nutrient requirements are very important in developing optimal physical, mental and creative abilities of students, emphasised speakers at an awareness programme entitled 'Adding value to nutrition management for adolescents', organised by the Foundation for Restoration of Nu-

tritional Values (FRNV) to make students globally competitive, at DAV Public School, Pokhariput. Principal Bipin Kumar Sahu welcomed the participants and opined that a balanced diet provides a real perspective to lifestyle. FRNV Odisha Chapter secretary Saumendra Das highlighted the main purpose

and goals of FRNV. Chairman Dr Arun Kumar Rath shed light on the importance of nutrition in the new National Education Policy, the importance of mid-day meal and advised the parents to always be careful about balanced and nutritious food. Nutrition activist Basant Kumar Kar as the keynote

speaker spoke about how the condition of malnutrition in Odisha has become serious. He shed light on the reasons for the lack of physical and mental development of children according to their age and gave appropriate guidance for its diagnosis. Everybody present took an oath to abstain from unhealthy food and always eat good food.

Home Minister Amit Shah launches Bharatpol portal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said it was time Indian investigation agencies use modern technology and techniques to nab fugitives as he launched the 'Bharatpol' portal to facilitate faster international assistance for agencies. Speaking at the launch of 'Bharatpol' at the Bharat Mandapam here, the minister underlined that the real-time interface was the most important feature of the portal developed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). It will allow central and state agencies to easily connect with the Interpol and speed up their investigations, he said. "It is time that we use modern technology and techniques to nab and bring to justice the fugitives who absconded from India after committing a crime," Shah said. "We have to



keep an eye on global challenges and update our internal systems. Bharatpol is a step in that direction," he said. He said the new portal will allow central and state probe agencies to share and obtain information on their cases from the 195 member nations of the Interpol. The three new criminal laws brought by the Modi government last year will ensure that trials against fugitives and absconders are conducted in a better manner. "I would urge the CBI to take the responsibility of training the states for capacity building regarding Bharatpol and also for the three new criminal laws. We need to institutionalise these systems along with the knowledge of various kinds of Interpol notices and their procedures," he said. The CBI and the National Central Bureau of India are responsible for Interpol-related affairs.

SC to examine issues over age bar for surrogate mothers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to examine on February 11 issues over the age bar for surrogate mothers and others under the laws. A bench comprising Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma, which heard about 15 petitions challenging certain provisions of the Surrogacy Regulation Act and the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, asked the Centre to file its written submissions in the case.

Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre, said she would file the written submissions and the government would abide by the apex court's directions. The court underscored the need to pass an interim order in the case.

The 2021 surrogacy laws set age limits for intended parents and surrogate mothers. According to the law, the intended mother must be between 23 and 50 years of age, and the intended father must



be between 26 and 55 years of age.

Further, the surrogate mother must be married and between 25 and 35 years of age, having a biological child, and only act as a surrogate once in her lifetime. The laws also provide conditions to regulate surrogacy.

The top court had outlined the importance of safeguarding the interests of surrogate moth-

ers, observing the need for a robust system to prevent exploitation, especially given commercial surrogacy was prohibited in India.

"There can be a database, so that the same lady is not exploited. A system must be there. Nobody is saying it's a bad idea, but at the same time, it can be badly used," the bench had said. The court also discussed alternative

mechanisms for compensating surrogate mothers and suggested a designated authority, instead of intending couples, for disbursing payments.

"You don't have to pay directly to the lady. The department pays. You will have to deposit," the bench proposed. Bhati said the laws currently permitted only altruistic surrogacy, in line with the objective of ban-

ning commercial surrogacy, and assured the court of the government's willingness to consider suggestions.

While altruistic surrogacy was commendable, the lack of adequate compensation mechanisms for surrogate mothers posed significant challenges, petitioners said. One of the petitioners said the existing provisions only covered medical expenses and insurance and was inadequate.

Dr Arun Muthuvel, a Chennai-based infertility specialist, is the lead petitioner and has challenged the constitutional validity of the twin laws. His plea said the laws were "discriminatory, exclusionary, and arbitrary in nature" which denied agency and autonomy in the discourse on reproductive justice, providing a state-sanctioned notion of the ideal family and restricting reproductive rights.

Other petitions raised similar concerns, such as the exclusion of unmarried women from the ambit of the surrogacy law and the restriction on oocyte donations under the ART Act.

CEC defends recent amendment to election rules restricting CCTV footage of polling booths from public inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday defended the recent amendment to election rules restricting CCTV footage of polling booths from public inspection, saying it is meant to protect voters' privacy and prevent use of data for creating fake narratives. Based on Election Commission's recommendation, the government had last month tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage of polling stations to prevent misuse. In his first remarks on tweak of Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, Kumar said only sharing of CCTV footage from inside and outside polling booths have been restricted. Addressing a press conference here to announce the schedule for Delhi Assembly polls, he

said such data or footage was banned for public inspection through EC's instructions in 2024.

He said certain other documents which are allowed under Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules will continue to be available.

Some documents which are already restricted from sharing are forms filled by poll officials about the name of the voter and the identity shown by them before voting.

Kumar said rules were amended to "protect the identity of the voters as well as their profiling". He said if the footage is made public, the identity of those who voted and those who did not, would be revealed and was violative of privacy norms. If footage of 10.5 lakh polling stations where suppose polling takes place for 10 hours is given out, it would mean data of one crore hours. "A person will need 3,600 years to go through the recordings if watched for eight hours daily," he said.



"Why does he want it? Let us ask this question from the person who wants it," Kumar said. He said the poll authority has examples to prove that the data would be used for machine learning and using AI to create narratives. The CEC said even fact checkers would not be able to find out whether the AI-generated videos of polling stations are fake or genuine. He said things which are to be restricted are yet to be defined

or prescribed in the rules.

The Union law ministry had amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers".

The law ministry and EC officials separately explained that

a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

While documents such as nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered. "CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the EC to ensure a level playing field," a former EC official explained.

An EC functionary said, "There have been instances where such electronic records were sought, citing the rules. The amendment ensures that only papers mentioned in the rules are available for public inspection and any other document which has no reference in the rules is not

allowed for public inspection."

Candidates already have access to all documents and papers, and nothing has been amended in the rules in this regard, the functionary added.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court, in the recent Mahmood Pracha vs EC case, had directed sharing all documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections, including treating CCTV camera footage as permissible under Rule 93(2), with Pracha.

The rule mentioned election papers. The election papers and documents do not specifically refer to electronic records, the EC functionaries said.

In order to remove this ambiguity, the rule has been amended to safeguard the misuse of CCTV camera footage of polling stations, another EC official explained.

A law ministry official said all election papers and documents were otherwise available for public inspection.

Difficult to define 'freebie': CEC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It is very difficult to define what a "freebie" is and the Election Commission's "hands are tied" on the issue as it is subjudice, CEC Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday. He also said it was "high time" that "accepted and legal answers" were found.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kumar was addressing a press conference to announce the schedule for the assembly polls in Delhi.

Asked about political parties announcing freebies during election campaigns, he said the matter was subjudice and referred to a court judgment that had held freebies were not "disallowed".

"What is freebie for me may be an entitlement for someone else... It is very difficult to define what a freebie is," Kumar said.



"Our proforma is on our website, this is high time it is accepted and legal answers are found but our hands are tied at the moment because the matter is subjudice," he added. Kumar further said that while such announcements were made, people should also be aware of the state's fiscal health. "It is necessary to see what is the fiscal health of a state... What is the debt-to-GDP ratio? How much will you borrow on that promise? How much is the financial cost of this promise?" he said.

All political parties urged to maintain decorum during elections, EC to ensure free and fair polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday urged political parties to maintain decorum during elections and said the Election Commission would conduct checks to ensure free and fair polls. Kumar was addressing a press conference to announce the schedule for the assembly polls in Delhi, further announced that India will soon create a new record of one billion-plus voters. "We will check everyone for ensuring money-free elections. During recent polls, there was a hue and cry that some helicopters were checked. People even come down to threatening polling officers but we control ourselves because it

disturbs the level playing field," Kumar said. "The star campaigners and those in political campaigns are duty-bound to ensure that etiquette is followed... We will be very harsh. Star campaigners should not act in a way that discourages common voters," he said.

District magistrates and returning officers will ensure fair play and a level playing field for every candidate, he added. "We will also request the political parties not to create undue pressure on the officials," Kumar said and added that the parties could ask for any explanation in writing.

Assembly polls in Delhi will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8, Kumar announced on Tuesday. Bypolls to two assembly constituencies -- Milkipur in Uttar

Pradesh and Erode in Tamil Nadu -- will also be held on the same date. New Delhi, Jan 6 (PTI) Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday dismissed allegations of manipulation in electoral roll, saying no deletion can occur without thorough documentation, field verification, and giving the concerned individual an opportunity to be heard. Kumar emphasised that the process for additions and deletions is transparent, rigorous, and immune to arbitrary changes.

Speaking at a press conference to announce the schedule for Delhi Assembly polls, the chief election commissioner (CEC) said, "Every step of the electoral roll process is rooted in transparency and accountability. Deletion of names is not pos-



sible without adhering to strict protocols, and every party has the right to raise objections at various stages." Kumar also

detailed the comprehensive process governing the maintenance of electoral roll. For additions, names are

included only after thorough foot-and-field verification by booth-level officers (BLOs), he said.

"Regular meetings are held with the representatives of political parties, who have the right to appoint booth-level agents (BLAs). Weekly lists of claims and objections are shared, and both draft and final rolls are published on the Election Commission's website. Polling station rationalisation is also carried out with the consultation of all the stakeholders," the CEC said.

On deletions, Kumar clarified that they are processed only through Form 7 or Form B, following strict guidelines.

"Mandatory field verification is conducted by the BLOs, and in cases where deletions exceed 2 per cent of a polling station's

voter list, cross-verification is done. Deletions due to death require a certified death certificate, and a seven-day window is provided for objections after notices are published online. Also, the affected voters are given the opportunity for a personal hearing before their names are removed," he said. "No deletion can occur without thorough documentation, field verification, and giving the concerned individual an opportunity to be heard," Kumar reiterated.

The CEC also pointed out that claims and objections are not only reviewed, but also shared with all the political parties and made accessible online to ensure transparency.

Criticising the tendency to question the integrity of the electoral process only during

elections, the CEC argued that allegations of mass deletions are misleading without evidence and undermine public trust in the system. "Where every vote matters, raising doubts about deletion of thousands of names without evidence is misleading. The processes we follow leave no room for manipulation," he stated.

The CEC's comments came in the backdrop of recent allegations made by Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, who claimed the voter list in the New Delhi Assembly constituency had been tampered with to influence the upcoming elections. Atishi also called for an immediate inquiry into the matter, alleging large-scale deletions to manipulate the electoral outcome.

SC allows Asaram interim bail on health grounds, bars meeting followers in group

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted till March 31 interim bail to jailed self-styled godman Asaram in a 2013 rape case observing he had various ailments and needed treatment.

A bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal directed 86-year-old Asaram not to meet his followers in a group post release.

"We have also taken note of the medical records pertaining to the petitioner and the fact that he was given periodical treatment outside the prison. Hence, we deem it fit to grant bail to the petitioner on medical ground till March 31, 2025.... Subject to the condition that the petitioner shall not meet his followers in a group," it said.

Asaram, however, would remain in jail as he faces another rape case in Jodhpur.

The court said it won't consider the plea on merits, but only the medical grounds. "There shall be three security



personnel in the form of police officers to be present in the vicinity of the petitioner. We make it clear that the police personnel will not interfere with the petitioner's medical treatment, his meeting with any individual and in a normal or lawful conduct," the bench said. Senior advocate Devadatt Kamat, appearing for Asaram, submitted his client's health condition was precarious.

Asaram, he said, was taken in and out of prison on more than thirteen occasions for medical treatment, and even the Rajasthan High Court granted

him parole after taking into consideration his condition. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state government, opposed the grant of bail and said though the ailment and his age were not in dispute, Asaram could be treated inside the prison. Mehta said three witnesses in the case were killed and said Asaram had the potential, capacity and finances to tamper with the evidence.

"He is in the last leg. Whatever may be the nature of the offence when it comes to the health of the convict, the con-

cern is of the state and well as this court," said the top court.

A sessions court in January, 2023, convicted Asaram in the 2013 rape case, filed by a woman who was living in his ashram near Gandhinagar at the time of the crime.

The Gujarat High Court on August 29 rejected Asaram's plea for the suspension of life imprisonment in the case.

Refusing to suspend the sentence and grant him bail, the high court observed no case for relief was made out.

It said his contentions about possible delay in the disposal of his appeal, age and the medical conditions were not relevant to the grant the relief.

The court also considered the alleged murder of two boys at his Sabarmati ashram besides the attacks on witnesses and the relatives of victims.

Asaram's plea said he was a victim of conspiracy, and the allegations of rape were false. The plea said the trial court erred in accepting the survivor's explanation for a delay of 12 years in lodging the complaint.

ITBP deployed six new battalions to enhance operational capability along LAC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police has brought "forward" 33 of its earmarked 56 border posts along the India-China LAC and deployed six new battalions as part of its plan to enhance operational capabilities along the icy front.

Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) Director General (DG) Rahul Rasgotra said this during the force's 63rd Raising Day parade on Tuesday in Odisha's Khordha district.

The about-90,000-personnel strong, mountain warfare-trained paramilitary marks its annual raising day on October 24 but the ceremonial event kept getting delayed for over two months due to a variety of reasons, a senior officer told PTI.

The DG said the force prepared a "forwardisation plan" and, as part of this, a total of 56 ITBP border posts along the India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC) were being brought "closer" to the front. Of the 56 border posts, 33 had already been brought closer to



the border, he said.

The ITBP chief also said the government sanctioned seven new battalions for border guarding tasks sometime ago.

Of these, six have been deployed along the LAC in Arunachal Pradesh while one is being based along the front in Sikkim. Rasgotra also said the force's technology-based surveillance capabilities were reviewed and, after some "shortcomings" were found, it was decided that

these deficiencies would be removed under the forthcoming modernisation plan.

The DG said the ITBP would also use the countrywide fibre network for ensuring "secure" operational communications and soon send a proposal to the Union home ministry for upgrading its weaponry. Speaking about the operations of the border force in Maoist violence-affected areas, the DG said some forward bases would soon be created in the most dif-

icult jungle areas of Abujhmad in Chhattisgarh.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has declared that India would be rid of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) by March 2026.

Rasgotra thanked the Union government and the home ministry for showing its concern to improve "basic" infrastructure facilities for the force at the LAC.

"Funds of Rs 2,500 crore have been made available this year for creating basic infrastructure for the ITBP. Last year, Rs 1,000 crore worth of funds were spent for construction work at forward posts and battalions etc.," the DG said. Raised in the aftermath of the 1962 Chinese aggression, the ITBP is primarily tasked with guarding the 3,488-kilometre-long LAC with China, apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain.

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai officiated as the chief guest at the event.

Naxalite attack: Chhattisgarh mourns loss of nine lives in Bijapur blast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DANTEWADA

Impassioned scenes of grief were witnessed as wreaths were laid on Tuesday at the mortal remains of eight police personnel and a civilian driver killed in a blast carried out by Naxalites in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, other senior state leaders and the inconsolable family members of the deceased paid homage at the wreath-laying ceremony here, amid chants of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram'. The family members of the deceased, including women and children, were seen crying as women security personnel tried to console them.

Chief Minister Sai, Deputy CM Vijay Sharma and Director General of Police Ashok Juneja lent their shoulders to the mortal remains of jawans as they were shifted to vehicles to transport them to the native places of the deceased.

In their biggest strike on security forces in Chhattisgarh in two years, Naxalites on Monday blew up the security personnel's vehicle using a 60-70 kg improvised explosive device (IED) near Ambeli village under Kutru police station area in Bijapur district. Eight security personnel, four each from the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Bastar Fighters units, travelling in the SUV and the vehicle's driver died on the spot, located around 70 km from Bijapur district headquarters. "Naxalites have become frustrated due to



which they have committed such a cowardly act. I pay my tribute to the martyred jawans and the civilian driver. The sacrifices of our jawans will not go in vain. They sacrificed their lives to establish peace in Chhattisgarh and in the country. We will, indeed, be successful in establishing peace," Sai added. Juneja and CRPF DG Vitul Kumar visited the site in Bijapur district

where eight security personnel and a civilian driver were killed. Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P and senior CRPF officials accompanied Director General Kumar, as per officials. A day after the incident in Bijapur, security forces on Tuesday recovered a 10 kg improvised explosive device (IED) planted by Maoists in

Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, police said. A team of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and district police found the explosive device near Belpochcha village on the Konta-Golapalli road, an official said. He said during a de-mining exercise on the route, security personnel spotted the IED planted beneath the road and averted a major mishap.

Odisha prepares for Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebration, expects 5,000 global delegates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

In its bid to make the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) event memorable for the guests visiting Odisha, the state government on Tuesday appealed to the residents of Bhubaneswar to decorate their houses as they do during Diwali celebration.

The state government in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs is hosting the PBD in Bhubaneswar, to be attended by around 5,000 delegates from around the world. The guests will come from around 50 countries, sources said. The administration has made arrangements like holding cultural events and keeping the state museum open till 9 pm. It even appealed to the residents of the state capital to decorate their houses as they do during Diwali. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has also urged people to welcome the NRIs on this occasion and show them due respect.

"Let us all together make this success and strive to ensure that the NRIs have the best experience of their lives in Odisha," Majhi said. Stating that Indians from all over the world are coming to Odisha, the chief minister said PBD is a great opportunity to showcase the rich art, culture



and heritage of the state to the world. He said the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack have been cleaned and sanitised to provide a beautiful and harmonious experience to the guests. Housing and Urban Development Minister Krishna Chandra Mohapatra appealed to the people of Bhubaneswar to decorate their houses by illuminating their houses and drawing 'Rangoli'. Shops and malls are also requested to decorate their establishments with lights and flower pots, the minister said. The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation and Bhubaneswar Development Authority have decorated the entire city with colourful paint on the walls and bridges across the state capital. Culture Minister Suryabanshi Suraj said the State Museum in Bhubaneswar will remain open till 9 pm every day for

three days during the PBD convention beginning on Wednesday. The State Museum generally remains open till 5.30 pm every day. Suraj said a number of programmes will be held during the event. He said that as part of the Odisha government's effort to highlight the state's rich culture, the department has organised three dance festivals from Tuesday evening which will continue till January 11 coinciding with the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. Stating that the classical dance and music are integral part of Odisha's culture and heritage, the minister said the Rajarani Music Festival, Mukteswar Odissi Dance Festival and International Odissi Dance Festival are being organised. The government has also organised a flower show and a bird festival at Chilika.

Teen girl dies after 33 hour rescue from 540 foot borewell in Kutch

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUJ/GUJARAT

An 18-year-old girl who fell into a 540-foot-deep borewell and was rescued after more than 33 hours in Gujarat's Kutch district was declared dead at a hospital here on Tuesday, officials said. The girl fell into the borewell at Kanderai village in Bhuj taluka around 6.30 am on Monday and was stuck at a depth of 490 feet, prompting the administration to launch a multi-agency rescue operation.

According to officials, the borewell had a diameter of one foot, and the fact that she was grown up and stuck deep into it made the rescue efforts difficult. The teenager was brought out at around 4 pm. "Unfortunately, the girl could not survive and was declared dead by doctors at GK General Hospital in Bhuj," said AB

Jadav, assistant collector and SDM, Bhuj. The official said the teen was brought out using a "hook technique", wherein L and J-shaped hooks were lowered into the borewell, fitted on two sides and pressure was applied from below to pull her up. An official from the state water supply and sewerage board said the girl was rescued using a makeshift contraption. "We prepared a makeshift contraption with the help of local drillers. Multiple agencies were involved in the rescue operation," he said. Teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Border Security Force (BSF) were involved in the rescue operation along with the fire department personnel of the Bhuj municipality, local emergency response team, police and officials of the local administration.

Congress divided over Pradip Bhattacharya's remarks on Mamata Banerjee's expulsion

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Congress is vertically divided over veteran party leader Pradip Bhattacharya's remarks that expelling the then State Youth Congress president and present Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee from the party was a big blunder for which the party was still suffering. While senior party leader and former State president Adhir Chowdhury refused comment on Banerjee's expulsion saying it Bhattacharya would be the best person to explain his own views, another senior leader close to present State president Subhankar Sarkar however conceded that Bhattacharya was "two hundred percent correct in his reading of the circumstances."

But a third Congress leader a former minister linked Bhattacharya's statements with his "itch to get a Rajya Sabha nomination which in any case he won't because Mamata Banerjee needs boot lickers and not politicians." Bhattacharya a former Rajya Sabha MP who is known for his good chemistry



with the Chief Minister earlier said that "Mamata Banerjee's expulsion from the party was a big mistake the after effects which is still being felt the Congress is still paying for its mistake." Banerjee was expelled from the party in January 1997 when AICC leader Somen Mitra was the party's State president. "He was expelled during the time of Sitaram Kesari ... he was the national president ... I still remember the day when Somen Mitra called me and told me that Kesari was asking him to expel Mamata, Bhattacharya said quoting Mitra who informed Bhattacharya that he was under intense pressure

from the central leadership. "Keshari told Somen Mitra that she should be expelled" because Delhi had already done that, Bhattacharya said adding how he had advised the Pradesh Congress president to desist from expelling her. "I told him not to do it ... 'whatever you do but don't do it' ... I had told Somen Mitra ... but finally she was expelled and the party is still paying the price of that step," it should not have taken because Banerjee raised a new outfit on January 1, 1998 and rest was history. "It is for everyone to see how the Congress has a sharp decline in Bengal since that time," Bhattacharya said.

Akhilesh alleges BJP role in Sambhal violence, calls it a government plot

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday unleashed a sharp critique of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accusing the ruling party of engineering the recent violence in Sambhal as part of a "government conspiracy." The incident, which claimed five lives, was not a communal riot but a "pre-planned act" allegedly executed with the involvement of local administration, Yadav charged.

Speaking at a press conference, Yadav alleged that the BJP was stoking unrest and targeting innocent citizens in Sambhal. "When an SP delegation tried to visit Sambhal, they were blocked by authorities. What is the government hiding?" he asked. According to him, the violence was deliberately orchestrated to disturb communal harmony in Uttar Pradesh.

The SP leader also condemned a controversial survey conducted at the Shahi Jama Masjid, a



Mughal-era mosque, calling it a ploy to implicate innocent people. "The Places of Worship Act, 1991, prohibits such surveys. What urgency drove this? It was a calculated act that led to violence," he asserted. Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey bolstered Yadav's claims while presenting a report on the incident. He alleged that the mosque survey team included BJP members and accused the police of using excessive force. "Instead of resorting to tear gas, they fired bullets, escalating tensions and disrupting peace," Pandey

said. The violence broke out on November 24 when a team from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) arrived at the Shahi Jama Masjid. The SP chief also targeted Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over allegations of cow slaughter. "A BJP MLA claims 50,000 cows are being slaughtered. If that's true, what is the so-called Sanatani CM doing? And if the MLA is wrong, why hasn't the government responded?" he questioned. Highlighting administrative lapses, Yadav pointed to the demolition of an ASI-protected building in Agra. "The structure was brought down by someone with connections to officials, all for business expansion. This is a glaring example of negligence," he said.

Wrapping up, Yadav appealed for accountability and urged religious leaders to demand transparency from the government. "I request saints and sages attending the Kumbh to question those in power. Many of them are involved in activities they should not be, impacting governance and society," he concluded.

reaching polling booths. Let the media visit Milkipur to witness the BJP's idea of democracy," he alleged. The SP chief also targeted Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over allegations of cow slaughter. "A BJP MLA claims 50,000 cows are being slaughtered. If that's true, what is the so-called Sanatani CM doing? And if the MLA is wrong, why hasn't the government responded?" he questioned. Highlighting administrative lapses, Yadav pointed to the demolition of an ASI-protected building in Agra. "The structure was brought down by someone with connections to officials, all for business expansion. This is a glaring example of negligence," he said. Wrapping up, Yadav appealed for accountability and urged religious leaders to demand transparency from the government. "I request saints and sages attending the Kumbh to question those in power. Many of them are involved in activities they should not be, impacting governance and society," he concluded.

Shattering records and coconuts: 68 year old folk artist achieves unbelievable feat

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A unique kind of world record was created in Kakkadu Maha Ganapathi Temple at Kunnankulam last week by Karakura Ramachandran Nair (68), a traditional folk artist. Nair broke more than 36,000 coconuts single-handedly by throwing them with force in front of the presiding deity of the temple, Vettakkoru Makan. It was a long event on 4 January performed without any kind of interruption or break.

Vettakkoru Makan is a tribal God born out of the relation between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi during their sojourn to India to gift Arjuna, the famous



Paasupathastra. Since both Lord Shiva and his consort were in the form of Kirata (hunters), the child was known as Vettakkoru Makan (son of hunters) and is

worshipped by the tribes dwelling in the forest. The child was mischievous and found pleasure in tormenting the Devas and Asuras alike. Both the groups approached

Lord Mahavishnu seeking his solace.

Lord Vishnu with a churika (sword-cum-dagger) appeared in front of Vettakkoru Makan who pleaded with the former to part with the special weapon. The Lord said that he was willing to hand over the weapon to him provided he behaved in a responsible manner and the child prodigy agreed to do so. In order to propitiate the good will of the child, the tribals started a ritual whereby they would break coconuts numbering 12,000 or more in front of him and this is performed without any break. "The ritual of breaking of 36,000 coconuts commenced around 8 PM and went up to

the wee hours of Sunday watched by thousands of devotees. There was no break of any kind during the entire process," Nair told The Pioneer. In Malabar region of Kerala, Vettakkoru Makan is worshipped by all sections of people irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Nair also disclosed that Saturday's event is likely to figure in the Guinness Book of World Records. "This is a ritual performed to make the deity calm, cool and happy. Many devotees have disclosed to us about the changes that happened in their lives following the breaking of coconut ritual," said Nair.

He is helped in the ritual by a group of youngsters who ensure that coconuts reach the podium and Nair could complete the process without any hitch. There should not be any kind of interruption during the ritual lest the deity gets annoyed and becomes furious. "This is an integrated form of ritual in which the mind, body and health all work in synchronization with the person. I rate this as a ritual art with aesthetic sense because the breaking of coconuts is accompanied by folk songs in praise of the deity and the machine-like functioning of the body matching with the non-stop playing percussion instruments," said Dr M G Gireesh, a physiscist-turned Indologist.

Eight coaching institute officials booked for cheating JEE aspirants



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THANE

Police on Tuesday said they have registered a criminal case against eight officials of a coaching institute for allegedly cheating students preparing for Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) of more than Rs 3 crore in Thane city.

Assistant Police Inspector (API) Sandeep Chavan of the Thane Nagar police station said the case was registered on Monday after some of the students filed a complaint against the institute which has branches in different parts of the country. The institute collected a sum of Rs 3,20,00,000 from the JEE students since January 2024 and abruptly closed shop and classes, and misused the collected fees, he said, quoting the complaint. JEE is a national-level entrance examination conducted for admission to various engineering colleges. The institute collected the fees in different bank accounts from the victims. The accused named in the FIR threatened the students when they approached them for a refund and to seek reasons for not holding classes, said Chavan.

Mahakumbh website opens a digital window into India's spiritual legacy

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Mahakumbh 2025, a monumental celebration of spirituality and culture, has garnered unprecedented global attention even before its commencement. The event's official website, <https://kumbh.gov.in/>, has emerged as the primary source of information for millions, connecting devotees worldwide to the essence of this grand festival.

Since its launch on October 6, 2024, by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the website has recorded over 33 lakh visitors from 183 countries and 6,200 cities as of January 4, reflecting its universal appeal. "Through this website, devotees can seamlessly access



details about the Mahakumbh, including its traditions, spiritual significance, major attractions, and travel options," said Sripati Tripathi, a member of the Government's PR team monitoring the website. "We have designed it

to ensure a smooth digital experience for millions of users, whether they are planning their visit or simply exploring the event's essence." The portal also outlines important guidelines for devotees, ensuring a safe and fulfilling experience. A media gallery

showcases visuals and videos of past Kumbh celebrations, offering a glimpse into the grandeur of the event. Furthermore, the website features regular updates about Prayagraj's infrastructure and tourist-friendly developments, underlining the city's transformation into a global pilgrimage hub. For international visitors, the website serves as an invaluable resource for understanding the essence of India's Sanatan heritage. Emily Johnson, a yoga enthusiast from the United States, shared, "The website made it easy for me to understand the traditions and plan my trip. It's fascinating how modern technology is preserving ancient practices." For Indian devotees like Rajesh Kumar, a

businessman from Varanasi, the portal has simplified the experience. "It has everything I need, from key dates to booking accommodations. It is all in one place," he remarked. Website analytics reveal that India leads in user traffic, followed by countries like the United States, Britain, Canada, and Germany. The surge in interest underscores Prayagraj's growing global appeal as a pilgrimage destination. Visitors are actively engaging with the content, exploring the event's spiritual significance while learning about the logistical aspects. A closer look at data highlights how users interact with the website. A significant portion of visitors are accessing travel

and accommodation details, while others focus on key bathing dates, spiritual content, and visuals of past events. The increasing traffic demonstrates the success of the Uttar Pradesh government's vision of making Mahakumbh 2025 a "Digital Mahakumbh," blending ancient tradition with modern technology. "The Mahakumbh 2025 website is not just a portal but a gateway to a profound spiritual journey. By making the event accessible to millions across the globe, it ensures that the legacy of the Kumbh resonates far beyond India's borders, uniting humanity in a shared celebration of spirituality and culture," Shishir Singh, Government spokesman said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trudeau steps down

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau resigns ahead of the upcoming elections

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's announcement of his resignation on January 6, 2025, marks a significant turning point in Canadian politics. Trudeau, who has served as Prime Minister since October 2015, made the decision amidst mounting pressure from his own party and growing challenges to his leadership. Trudeau's decision to step down comes against a backdrop of increasing discontent within the ruling Liberal Party. During his announcement outside Rideau Cottage in Ottawa, Trudeau acknowledged the internal discord that had hindered his leadership. In a strategic move, Trudeau met with Governor General Mary Simon to secure the prorogation of Parliament until March 24, effectively delaying the possibility of a no-confidence vote that was anticipated in the session scheduled to begin on January 27. This decision provides the Liberal Party with a window to elect a new leader and stabilise its position ahead of potential political upheaval. Trudeau's resignation reflects a culmination of political and personal challenges. The Liberal Party's diminishing unity became a significant obstacle for Trudeau's leadership. Discontent among MPs and party members had been growing, fueled by concerns over policy decisions, governance style, and declining public support.



After nearly a decade in office, Trudeau's administration faced criticism over issues such as economic management, healthcare and Canada's climate policy. These challenges eroded his public approval, making him a less viable candidate for the next election. By stepping down before the next election, Trudeau's resignation allows the Liberal Party to rejuvenate its leadership and present a fresh face to voters, potentially mitigating electoral risks. Trudeau's departure will have significant political and national implications. The resignation sets the stage for a competitive leadership race within the Liberal Party. The choice of the next leader will be critical in determining the party's future direction and its ability to retain power. Trudeau's resignation reshapes Canada's political dynamics. The opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, is likely to leverage this transition period to challenge the Liberals' governance record and push for early elections. Trudeau's tenure, marked by landmark achievements such as legalising cannabis, advancing gender equality, and climate initiatives, will now be evaluated in the context of his departure. His legacy will hinge on whether the Liberal Party can sustain these accomplishments under new leadership. Justin Trudeau's resignation underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly evolving landscape. While his decision to step down reflects personal and political pragmatism, it also signals a pivotal moment for Canadian democracy. The coming months will determine how effectively the Liberal Party navigates this transition and whether Canada's political institutions can maintain stability amid change. Trudeau's departure opens the door to new opportunities and challenges for Canada's political future.

trouderisks. Trudeau's departure will have significant political and national implications. The resignation sets the stage for a competitive leadership race within the Liberal Party. The choice of the next leader will be critical in determining the party's future direction and its ability to retain power. Trudeau's resignation reshapes Canada's political dynamics. The opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, is likely to leverage this transition period to challenge the Liberals' governance record and push for early elections. Trudeau's tenure, marked by landmark achievements such as legalising cannabis, advancing gender equality, and climate initiatives, will now be evaluated in the context of his departure. His legacy will hinge on whether the Liberal Party can sustain these accomplishments under new leadership. Justin Trudeau's resignation underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly evolving landscape. While his decision to step down reflects personal and political pragmatism, it also signals a pivotal moment for Canadian democracy. The coming months will determine how effectively the Liberal Party navigates this transition and whether Canada's political institutions can maintain stability amid change. Trudeau's departure opens the door to new opportunities and challenges for Canada's political future.

PICTALK



Farmers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Nadia

India's Gorkha Brigade: A legacy at crossroads

The iconic Gorkha Brigade faces an uncertain future with the freeze on Nepal domiciled Gorkha recruitment under the Agnipath scheme



ASHOK K MEHTA

The press and media are flooded with stories about Nepal Domiciled Gorkha soldiers and their imperiled future in the Indian Army under the Agnipath scheme. With the last NDG in India's Gorkha Brigade likely to retire around 2045-50, it is possible two Gorkha soldiers could confront each other in Doklam, or elsewhere along the LAC should NDGs start joining the PLA. Traditionally, they have joined the British Army since the early 19th century, later the Singapore Police and Brunei Army and still later, the French Foreign Legion and the Russian Army (around 15,000 according to Al Jazeera news). Soldiering is in their blood with the first choice always and every time, the British Army has pampered as well as exploited them. On 10 November 2024, Kathmandu Post carried a front-page picture of impeccably smart Gorkhas at an attestation parade in the UK.

Three brothers in a Nepali family could still be in British, Indian and Nepalese armies in that order of preference. But Britain does not recruit Indian Domiciled Gorkhas. NDGs ceased joining the Indian Army for 5 years rendering hopelessly bleak the future of the Gorkha Brigade and a strategic glue that binds India and Nepal. Last year, in November and December, Indian and Nepalese Army Chiefs who became honorary Generals in each other's army spent a week in the other's country and were made much of. Last week, 1/11 Gorkha Rifles commanded by Col JP Singh went for joint training with the Sri Sri Jung battalion of the Nepal Army at Saljhandi near the border town of Butawal. (With PLA Nepal Army does only platoon-level joint training restricted to Kathmandu Valley). No weapons are carried by either contingent as the host country provides them. No two sovereign armies and their Chiefs have such unique rapport. Despite the shared history, geography and historic links between the two countries and their armies, recruitment of NDGs has been frozen since India took the unilateral decision in June 2022 to change



the terms of engagement that Kathmandu says violated Treaty arrangements. Curiously both countries have remained silent at the political and military levels. India's seniormost officer, Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Anil Chauhan from 11 Gorkha Rifles has been approached by several Gorkha veterans to try to break the stalemate but he is loath to approach PM/RM/NSA saying that the government 'has taken a political decision'. QED It is his responsibility to raise the decision-making process to the next level as other Army Chiefs in the past have done in the national interest. During the economic blockade in 2015, Gen Dalbir Singh was able to persuade PM Narendra Modi and FM Sushma Swaraj that prolonging the blockade would adversely affect the livelihood of Indian Army Gorkha ex-servicemen and families of serving soldiers in Nepal which in turn would impact bilateral relations. The blockade was ended but bilateral ties were seriously disturbed. After King Gyanendra conducted the Palace coup in 2004, India decided to stop the supply of lethal armaments to the Nepal Army which was fighting the Maoists. Then Army Chief, Gen JJ Singh, recommended against it. In a slanging match between MoD and EAM, Prime

DESPISE THE SHARED HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORIC LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THEIR ARMIES, RECRUITMENT OF NDGS HAS BEEN FROZEN SINCE INDIA TOOK THE UNILATERAL DECISION IN JUNE 2022 TO CHANGE THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT THAT KATHMANDU SAYS VIOLATED TREATY ARRANGEMENTS

Minister Manmohan Singh upheld the embargo. On the other hand, Siachen, Army Chiefs had prevailed in convincing Singh not to budge over any withdrawal from or concessions on Siachen. In 1986, during the Gorkhaland movement in North Bengal, as a senior Gorkha officer who had been deployed there, I was invited to a meeting by Principal Secretary to PM, Sarla Grewal along with Deputy Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Rawat for discussion on the violence and our response. In the higher direction of war in 1971, PM Indira Gandhi consulted Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw at every stage for planning and conduct of battle. In 1975, then Army Chief, Gen Gopal Bewoor, 11 Gorkha Rifles convinced Mrs Gandhi of the negative impact of stopping the recruitment of NDGs. So this is not the first time that the absurd idea of ending NDG recruitment has come up. But this time government decided on NDGs that CDS accepted. Lt Gen Sanjeev Chauhan is the senior officer and President Gorkha Brigade which meets annually in February in a unique assembly of seven Gorkha regiments to discuss professional matters. On recruitment of NDGs, they too are stuck at the Army Chief/CDS level. Two years ago, I wrote a letter

on strategic loss accruing from altered rules of NDG recruitment to the PM, PK Mishra. No acknowledgement nor reply was received. Service Chiefs in the past have been willing and able to advise political authority on military matters. The consultative process has stopped with this government. On December 15, 2024, while inaugurating India's World magazine, Foreign Minister Jaishankar conspicuously omitted to mention national security or the military component of international relations as part of India's foreign policy vision. Answering a question last year on why no NDG recruitment he said foreign policy is determined by India's national interest and not that of any other country, implying Nepal. India's national interests in terms of defence and security are entwined with those of Nepal with whom New Delhi claims a special relationship which Kathmandu mildly reaffirms. It was Modi who said in Nepal's Parliament in 2014 that India has fought no war where Nepalese blood was not shed. India-Nepal relations are written in blood. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AUSTRALIA WINS B-G TROPHY

Madam — Australia deserves to be the winner of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy by their immaculate performance under the brilliance of Pat Cummins. While India was beaten thoroughly 3-1, the little hope in the Sydney test was vanquished when the ace Jasprit Bumrah got injured at the inappropriate time. All the credit goes to Bumrah and the world-class bowler claimed the man of the series despite India losing heavily, indicating that he's the supreme bowler from both sides. World stalwarts rated him high with huge respect for him and he has been shortlisted for the ICC men's cricketer of the year award for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, which has seen him walking tall among geniuses among world cricketers. It's unfortunate that Captain Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were the great disappointment and the ultimate reasons for Team India losing the rhythm for the Titanic sink at the end. Though the young Jaiswal has been spectacular and K L Rahul did some good work, Pant played a cameo in a few innings that wasn't good enough for the team to pull back when the rest of the batters failed miserably at the end. Aussies Scott Boland's splendid variation and bounce would make Kohli remember Scott Boland more than Anushka in his dreams in this series by dismissing Virat 4 times out of Boland's 5 innings by having faced 68 balls for a mere 28 runs. Boland came into the side during the middle of the series and was the only breather for the Indian team. Anyhow, the series has not only the test for players but also for the head coach too. Gambhir needs to study a few management lessons. Hope the team India would make a comeback in the upcoming fixtures of T20 against England and in the following months to prove their worth to serve a few Badusa to ICC Chief Jay Shah to bring back sweeter moments for the fans too in the future.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

Create safe online environment for kids



The digital age has revolutionised childhood, with social media becoming an integral part of how young people connect and communicate. Yet, this evolution brings significant risks that demand urgent action. In this backdrop, India's draft rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act mandating consent of parents/guardians for minors to open social media accounts are a commendable step in safeguard-

ing children. The proposed rules make social media companies accountable for verifying parental consent through robust measures, empowering the guardians to guide their wards' online interactions. To refine these rules, additional measures like AI-driven age verification, digital literacy workshops and transparent complaint mechanisms are essential. Regular audits, stakeholder feedback and alignment with global standards will further enhance the framework. By adopting these rules, India contributes to a global effort to create a safer online environment for children. In a world where digital engagement is unavoidable, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the youngest users is not merely a responsibility but also an ethical imperative. Building collaboration among parents, educators and social media platforms is crucial for lasting change.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS REFORM

Madam—This refers to the article on turning Canada's crisis into India's opportunity. This looks to be an incongruent aspiration. Because Indian industries are already expressing their difficulties in getting recruitable skilled workers. This crisis is further confirmed by the latest programme to train 10 lakh youth as apprentices. 500 industries are listed out to engage in this programme in which both the trainees and the engaged industries are incentivised. The fact is the participants are already educated diploma or degree holders. The education system is yet to be tuned in such a manner as to make those completing education employable with appropriate skills and enough knowledge. It would be more appropriate to correct our systems before aiming at utilising others' crises into our opportunities. Having put education in the hands of the private players, the quality of education suffers the most. Except producing degree holders, simply by utilising the talent of overheating and reproducing no

scope for creativity is offered. In the name of introducing new educational system subjects like astrology is being introduced. The education system urgently needs a total revamping to make it meaningful.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

BIDHURI SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam —BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri's statement, "We will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," is not just an insult but also a reflection of his mentality. If such remarks can be made by a prominent senior party candidate, what can we expect from an ordinary citizen? The BJP should take strict action against Ramesh Bidhuri, as such a derogatory statement by a party member not only tarnishes his reputation but also damages the party's image. He should issue a public apology for this remark.

Priya Thakur | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Digital shield: Safeguarding children from the digital trap

The Indian government has proposed the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 to fortify children's online safety through robust data protection measures



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

The digital revolution has profoundly transformed how we live, learn, and connect. While this transformation offers immense opportunities for growth and development, it also poses significant risks, especially for vulnerable populations such as children. The digital world is fraught with challenges, from exposure to inappropriate content to exploitation through targeted advertising. Recognising the urgent need for robust protections, the Indian government has introduced the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. These rules, still in draft form, have the potential to safeguard children from falling into digital traps by establishing a comprehensive framework for responsible data handling. A cornerstone of the draft rules is the requirement for verifiable parental consent before processing children's data. This mandate ensures that entities cannot collect or use data about minors without explicit authorisation from their parents or legal guardians. For



example, creating an account on a social media platform or an online gaming service requires parents to verify their identity and approve the data processing activities. This provision is vital in reducing the risks posed by predatory targeting, identity theft, and unauthorised data collection. By putting parents in control, the rules prevent businesses from exploiting children's data for financial gain. This safeguard is particularly important in protecting children from behavioural profiling, which can have long-term implications on their psychological development and privacy. Educational institutions play a critical role in a child's growth, but they, too, rely heavily on data collection. The draft rules explicitly

address this by restricting data processing in schools and allied institutions to activities that are essential for educational purposes or the safety of students. For instance, tracking attendance, monitoring behaviour, and ensuring the security of transportation services are permissible, but excessive or irrelevant data collection is prohibited. These safeguards ensure that children's data is not misused or repurposed without clear justification. The digital world can be a double-edged sword. While it offers educational resources and entertainment, it also exposes children to inappropriate or harmful content. The draft rules mandate that data fiduciaries implement measures to ensure that children cannot access content that negatively affects their well-being. This includes filtering out materials related to violence, explicit content, and other age-inappropriate material. Such provisions are critical in protecting the mental and emotional health of children, who are particularly susceptible to the influence of harmful digital stimuli. Moreover,

they underscore the importance of collaboration between regulators and technology companies to create a safer online environment. Consent managers play a pivotal role in the new framework. As intermediaries, they enable data principals—in this case, parents or guardians—to give, manage, review, and withdraw consent for data processing activities. These managers must ensure that the process is transparent and user-friendly, empowering parents to monitor how their children's data is being utilised. The draft rules also require consent managers to maintain detailed records of consent given, denied, or withdrawn, enhancing accountability across the board. While the draft rules represent a significant leap forward, their successful implementation hinges on overcoming several challenges. This calls for innovative solutions, such as integrating verified digital IDs like Aadhaar with consent management systems. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)

FIRST COLUMN
TEN MEANINGFUL RESOLUTIONS FOR 2025

It is time to focus on resolutions that align with our aspirations



SHAINY SHARMA

The dawn of a new year provides a blank canvas to rewrite your story, redefine your priorities, and reimagine the future. In 2025, seize this opportunity by setting resolutions that not only align with your aspirations but also enhance your quality of life. This year calls for more than just ambitious declarations – it demands realistic, sustainable changes that can truly transform our lives. Here are ten meaningful resolutions worth keeping making 2025 your best year yet.

1. **Digital Wellness Revolution:** The first and foremost is to break free from screen addiction by implementing a “sunset hour” for devices. Keeping aside one hour before bedtime for offline activities like reading or meditation will definitely help in improving both sleep quality as well as mental health.

2. **Financial Intelligence Upgrade:** Financial stability is a key component of a stress-free life. Start by evaluating your spending habits and creating a realistic budget by dedicating at least 30 minutes weekly to learning about investments and financial planning. By aiming to save consistently and work towards reducing debt, setting financial goals can provide clarity and motivation.



3. **Sustainable Living Practices:** As global awareness of environmental challenges grows, adopting sustainable habits is more important than ever. By transforming your environmental impact through practical steps such as switching to reusable products, adopting a plant-based meal day, and calculating your monthly carbon footprint to identify areas for improvement.

4. **De-clutter your space:** A cluttered environment often mirrors a cluttered mind. Take time in 2025 to organize and declutter your living and working spaces. Try working towards donating or recycling items that are no longer in need and creating systems to maintain the same.

5. **Relationship Enrichment:** Human connections are the bedrock of happiness and fulfillment. This year, try making a conscious effort to nurture your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.

6. **Physical Health Revolution:** Developing regular physical activity is the cornerstone of good health. In 2025, move a daily habit. Whether it's strength training, yoga, swimming, or brisk walking, find an activity you enjoy and stick to it. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week to improve cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles, and boost mental well-being.

7. **Mental Fitness Focus:** A positive mindset can transform your experiences. In 2025, focus on the good in every situation, practice self-compassion, and surround yourself with uplifting individuals. Integrate daily mental health practices such as five minutes of mindfulness, gratitude journaling, or therapeutic creativity. Positivity fuels resilience and empowers you to overcome challenges with grace.

8. **Knowledge Expansion:** Read one book monthly on subjects outside your comfort zone. This broadens perspectives and keeps your mind agile in our rapidly changing world.

9. **Community Engagement:** Helping others fosters a sense of purpose and connection. Find a cause you care about and dedicate time or resources to it. Community service not only helps others but also provides networking opportunities and personal fulfillment. Volunteering not only benefits those in need but also enriches your own life with meaning and fulfillment.

10. **Creative Expression:** Dedicate time weekly to any form of creativity – writing, painting, music, or crafts. Creative outlets reduce stress and enhance problem-solving skills. As we embrace 2025, let's move beyond traditional resolution-setting and focus on creating meaningful, lasting changes that enhance both our personal growth and our impact on the world around us.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Farmers shunning use of nano-urea despite promotion



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite a strong push from the government and ambitious targets for production and adoption, the fiscal year 2023-24 witnessed a sharp 43 per cent drop in nano-urea sales

Last year, around this time, the Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya had said “Consumption of urea this fiscal (read: FY 2023-24) is likely to be 8 percent less than in FY 2022-23 due to the use of its liquid nano variant. Because of this and higher domestic production, import of urea, the soil nutrient that accounts for 70 percent of the fertilizer subsidy bill, declined more than a fifth on year in 2023. Further spread of nano urea consumption and the start of a new large urea plant (Talcher in Odisha) by September 2023 would lead to elimination of imports in two-three years”.

Nano-urea is urea in the form of a nanoparticle containing nitrogen particles of 20-50 nanometres (nm) in size. It provides nitrogen or ‘N’ to plants in liquid form as an alternative to conventional urea which is mostly supplied as prill (it is a small diameter, spherical white solid). The minister’s statement pointed towards the commitment of the government to promote the use of nano-urea so that imports of conventional urea are brought down to eliminating it.

However, according to data from the Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) – an umbrella body of the fertilizer industry – the sales of Nano urea plummeted by nearly 43 per cent during FY 2023-24 (this happened after growing by a significant 62 per cent during FY 2022-23). Meanwhile, the total production of Nano urea during FY 2023-24 was 81 per cent less than in the previous FY.

The manufacturers knew that there wouldn’t be much demand for it; so they reduced the output even as its production capacity rose by 59 per cent. Why did the sales of Nano-urea decrease? But, before that, we need to understand why the government is so keen to promote its use.

The beauty of nano-urea lies in its ultra-small size and high surface area (10,000 times over 1 mm urea prill), which enable easy absorption by plant leaves. These particles enter the plant through cuticular pores, or stomata, and then penetrate the cell membranes through endocytosis. Once inside the cell, these release nutrients slowly and ensure full absorption by eliminating waste that normally happens with conventional means. The innovator namely Nano Biotechnology Research Centre (NBRC) of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) claims its efficiency (a measure of how much of the ‘N’ supplied from it is absorbed by the plant) is over 80 per cent against around 40 per cent for the conventional stuff.

The use of nano-urea also results in higher crop yield by 3-16 per cent when compared to traditional urea. Moreover, unlike the latter which raises environmental concerns including nitrate leaching, global warming, ozone layer depletion, and groundwater pollution, the former causes less soil, water and air pollution. According to a study, two foliar sprays of nano-urea curtailed nitrogen load by 25 per cent, besides reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission from 164.2 to 416.5 kg CO₂-eq ha⁻¹ under different crops.



FOR A COUNTRY THAT DEPENDS HEAVILY ON IMPORTS AND EVEN INCURS HUGE SUBSIDIES, WHY WOULD THE GOVERNMENT ALLOW EXPORTS? THE INDUSTRY, HOWEVER, CONCEDES THAT THERE WAS UNSOLD INVENTORY WITH DEALERS AND THAT MIGHT HAVE IMPACTED SALES DURING 2023-24

A more startling claim made by IFFCO/NBRC is that a 500-ml bottle of nano-urea is equivalent to a 45-kg bag of conventional urea.

The latter contains 46 percent N nutrient, or 20 kg (45x0.46). In contrast, the former contains 4 per cent N, or 20 grams (500x.04). The equivalence between the two means that urea in nano-form with a mere 20 grams can achieve what conventional urea does with 20 kg – a gap of 1000 times in efficiency. It is this monumental difference in efficiency that also enables the manufacturer to deliver a 500-ml bottle of nano-urea to farmers for Rs 240 without any subsidy support.

In contrast, the cost of supplying equivalent conventional urea in a 45 kg bag, is over eleven times at around Rs 2650 (while, this figure is for imported urea, even for urea produced domestically, the cost is substantially higher and varies from unit to unit), the Government has to give a subsidy of Rs 2410 to make available to the farmer at the same price of Rs 240. There being 22.22 bags in a ton of urea (1000/45), the subsidy on the import of a ton of conventional urea comes to Rs 53,550 (2410x22.22).

If we were to replace one million tons of imported urea with nano-urea which doesn’t require any subsidy support, the government would save Rs 53,550 million or Rs 5355 crore. Mandaviya had kept a target of producing about 55 million bottles of nano-urea during FY 2023-24 which replaces 2.5 million tons of conventional urea. This would yield savings of around Rs 13,400 crore

in subsidy.

Around 600 cubic metres of natural gas (NG) is needed to produce a ton of conventional urea. For generating the same effect through the nano-urea – given the efficiency difference of 1000 times, the requirement of NG would be a mere 0.6 cubic meters (600/1000). This would lead to huge savings in the import of gas (currently, India imports one-third of its requirement for domestic urea production). Drastic reduction in load on infrastructure will be a bonus. Imagine the impact of handling, moving, storing and delivering a 500 - ml bottle of nano-urea vis-à-vis a bag of conventional urea containing 45,000 grams of the material.

The use of nano-urea thus offers unprecedented possibilities in terms of not just a substantial reduction in fertilizer subsidy but also trimming excess consumption of urea thereby reducing the imbalance in fertilizer use improving soil health, and helping achieve the environment-related goals. Additional benefits will accrue by way of savings in foreign exchange outgo, and a reduction in the current account deficit.

What explains the setback during FY 2023-24? Reportedly, the industry’s argument that the fall in production and sales was due to ‘the launch of new products such as Nano urea plus, with a higher concentration of nitrogen and reduction in sales of earlier variants of Nano urea that had lower nitrogen concentration’ is untenable. This is because whatever the level of ‘N’ concentration, fundamentally

the product remains ‘Nano-urea’. Another explanation is that ‘the drop in sales because fact that farmers had bought large quantities of Nano urea in the previous years’ doesn’t cut ice. Farmers generally are not prone to stocking fertilizer material as the majority of them just don’t have the wherewithal to hold stocks.

A third possibility that lower domestic sales could be due to the export of nano-urea doesn’t make sense. For a country that depends heavily on imports and even incurs huge subsidies, why would the government allow exports? The industry, however, concedes that there was unsold inventory with dealers and that might have impacted sales during 2023-24. This shows that even during 2022-23, farmers didn’t lift nano-urea to the extent revealed by the sales figures of that year. One can’t escape inferring that nano-urea could be losing charm amongst farmers.

If it is due to factors like their being unable to cope with the rigours of the new technology (spraying it on leaves is more challenging than prill urea) or shortage of skilled labour etc, those can be overcome. But, if it is due to tall claims regarding efficiency or yield going haywire, it is a matter of concern. For instance, a study released by Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) in January 2024 says that the ‘use of nano-urea led to decrease in the yield of wheat and rice by 21.6 per cent 13 percent respectively.’

(The writer is a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

Prashant Kishor’s Jansuraj: A new political force or BJP’s strategic move in Bihar?

As the 2025 assembly elections approach, the big question remains: Can Kishor truly reshape Bihar’s political future, or is his role simply to disrupt opposition unity?

Prashant Kishor, a name synonymous with political strategy, has made his debut in Bihar politics with the launch of his party, Jansuraj. Drawing an analogy to a potter, Kishor likens his work to shaping the best clay into something meaningful, declaring, “We are bringing forward the best people of society. My role is to make this party win. I am in the role of a sutradhar (narrator); I have announced after the formation of the party that I will not run it. The party people will run the party.”



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

ing the elections,” he insists. “I do not feel like contesting, but if the party decides that only I can secure a seat, then it will be a collective decision. I am not bigger than the party.” Despite his assertions, Kishor’s entry into Bihar politics has stirred discussions about the impact of Jansuraj on the state’s political landscape, particularly in the context of the 2025 assembly elections. Questions loom: will his party

weaken the NDA or the INDIA alliance? Political analysts suggest that Kishor, with his background as a strategist for both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, could be a disruptive force. Some even speculate that he might be a BJP-backed “pawn,” designed to fragment opposition votes, a claim fueled by his apparent inability to align with the Congress or RJD leadership.

Kishor’s criticisms of Nitish Kumar’s governance have been particularly sharp. He has lambasted Kumar’s leadership style, though his past affiliations with the BJP have also fueled skepticism. Adding to the intrigue, JDU leaders have dismissed Kishor’s efforts as insignifi-

cant. JDU, meanwhile, continues to champion causes like the nationwide caste census and the “One Nation, One Election” policy. It also plans to hold a workers’ meeting in Nalanda on January 20, 2025, to gauge its position before the elections. JDU’s reliance on caste-based politics, particularly its focus on Mahadalits, underscores its strategy for retaining relevance.

Recognizing the centrality of caste and community dynamics in Bihar politics, Kishor has crafted his approach accordingly. His first major move was targeting the Muslim and backward caste vote banks, which collectively account for 53.8 per cent of the electorate. To solidify his position, he announced plans



to field more candidates from Muslim and extremely backward communities in the upcoming elections. The appointment of a Dalit as Jansuraj’s first working president further underscored this strategy. This decision, however, drew criticism, with some perceiving it as an overt counter to JDU’s Mahadalit card. Kishor’s

emphasis on Dalit representation, though a significant gesture, was met with resistance from sections of the political spectrum.

Before launching Jansuraj, Kishor spent two years traveling across Bihar, conducting a padayatra and engaging in public dialogues in villages and towns. His campaign drew heavily from the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, echoing a narrative of grassroots empowerment. However, his advocacy for ending Bihar’s liquor prohibition—a policy closely associated with Nitish Kumar’s governance—has sparked controversy. Critics argue that this stance contradicts Gandhian principles and exposes Kishor to allegations of opportunism.

Despite the criticisms, Kishor’s efforts signal a genuine attempt to address Bihar’s long-standing issues. Bihar has long grappled with challenges like unemployment, poor infrastructure, and rising crime. Kishor positions Jansuraj as a platform to tackle these problems, but whether he can deliver remains to be seen.

Kishor’s focus on marginalised communities, grassroots dialogue, and inclusive leadership sets a distinct tone. However, his political credibility and ability to translate ideas into action will be closely scrutinized. As the assembly elections approach, the political battlefield in Bihar is becoming increasingly dynamic. JDU’s focus on its traditional voter

base and initiatives like the caste census may clash directly with Jansuraj’s appeal to similar demographics. Meanwhile, speculation about Kishor’s BJP connections and his critique of Nitish Kumar suggest that his presence will influence alliances and electoral strategies across the board.

Prashant Kishor’s entry into Bihar politics marks a significant shift. By forming Jansuraj, he has sought to disrupt the status quo and present a new alternative. However, whether he can truly emerge as a transformative leader or will merely fragment votes remains the critical question.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

South Korean agency receives new warrant to detain impeached President Yoon

PTI ■ SEOUL

South Korea's anti-corruption agency said it received a new court warrant on Tuesday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after its previous attempt was blocked by the presidential security service last week. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which plans to question the embattled president on rebellion allegations over his short-lived martial law decree on Dec. 3, didn't immediately confirm how long the warrant would remain valid. The agency's chief prosecutor, Oh Dong-woon, refused to answer when asked by lawmakers when the warrant would expire, saying such information is sensitive as the agency and

police contemplate ways to execute it. Detention warrants typically last seven days but can be extended to around 10 days. Oh didn't say when investigators planned to make their next attempt to detain Yoon. The Seoul Western District Court last week had initially issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after he repeatedly defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning. About 150 anti-corruption agency investigators and police officers attempted to detain Yoon on Friday but retreated from his residence in Seoul after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours. The investigators did not

make another attempt to detain Yoon and the previous court warrants expired after a week on Monday. If investigators manage to detain Yoon, they will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, he will be released after 48 hours. The anti-corruption agency and police have pledged to make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon, which could be a complicated process as long as he remains in his official residence. The anti-corruption agency is leading a joint investigation with the police and military into Yoon's brief power grab, which included declaring martial law and dispatching troops to surround the National Assembly. Lawmakers who managed to get past the block-

ade voted to lift martial law hours later. Yoon's presidential powers were suspended after the opposition-dominated Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion. The Constitutional Court has started deliberations on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him. Members of the presidential security staff were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills leading up to the presidential compound over the weekend. Oh confirmed to lawmakers that the agency was debating with police on whether to arrest members of the presidential security staff if they forcefully obstruct efforts to detain Yoon. Police have said they are considering "all avail-

able options" to bring Yoon into custody and haven't publicly ruled out the possibility of deploying SWAT teams, although it's unclear whether investigators would risk escalating a confrontation with presidential security forces, who are also armed. Park Jong-joon, chief of the presidential security service, has hit back against criticism that it has become Yoon's private army, saying it has legal obligations to protect the incumbent president. He and his deputy have so far defied summonses by police, who planned to question them over the suspected obstruction of official duty following Friday's events. In a parliament hearing Tuesday, Oh criticized the country's acting leader,

Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, for instructing police to oblige with the presidential security service's request to deploy personnel to Yoon's residence to beef up security ahead of Friday's detention attempt. The police did not carry out Choi's instruction, and Oh said the agency was reviewing whether Choi's actions constituted an obstruction of official duty. The agency has repeatedly called for Choi to instruct the presidential security service to comply with the execution of the detention warrant against Yoon. Choi hasn't commented. Yoon's lawyers argued the detention and search warrants against the president cannot be enforced at his residence due to a law that protects locations potentially

linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge — which would be Yoon. They also argue the anti-corruption office lacks the legal authority to investigate rebellion charges and delegate police to detain Yoon. Yoon's lawyers on Monday filed complaints with public prosecutors against Oh and six other anti-corruption and police officers over Friday's detention attempt, which they claim was illegal. The lawyers also filed complaints against the country's acting national police chief, the acting defense minister and two Seoul police officials for ignoring the presidential security service's request to provide additional forces to block Yoon's detention attempt.

Trump renews offer of making Canada 51st state of US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Hours after the resignation of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, US President-elect Donald Trump on Monday renewed his offer of making Canada the 51st state of the United States. Trudeau, 53, announced to resign Monday as he was forced by his ruling Liberal Party amidst his growing unpopularity. General elections are scheduled this year. The Canadian prime minister said that he would stay on as prime minister till the party elected a new leader. Trump, 78, who never had a good relationship with Trudeau even during his first term from 2017-2021, has been floating the idea of making Canada the 51st state of the United States ever since he met Trudeau after his November 5 electoral victory in Mar-a-Lago. Thereafter, he has been mentioning this on his social media posts several times. "Many people in Canada LOVE being the 51st State. The United States can no longer suffer the massive Trade Deficits and Subsidies that Canada needs to stay afloat. Justin Trudeau knew this, and resigned," Trump said on Truth Social. "If Canada merged with the US, there would be no Tariffs, taxes would go way down, and they would be TOTALLY SECURE from the threat of the Russian and Chinese Ships that are constantly surrounding them. Together, what a great Nation it would be!!!" said the president-elect after the resignation of Trudeau on Monday. There has not been much reaction to Trump's proposal from the Canadian side. Trump has threatened to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian imports if Toronto is not able to stop the flow of illicit drugs and illegal migrants from its southern border with the US. In some of the posts, Trump even mocked Trudeau as "Governor of the Great State of Canada."

Biden 'doing everything possible' to make transition difficult: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump has accused Joe Biden of making the presidential transition difficult, citing recent executive orders on climate and other official acts being taken by him in his last weeks as president. Trump, 78, is slated to be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20. He replaces Biden as the new occupant of the White House, the official residence of the US President. "Biden is doing everything possible to make the TRANSITION as difficult as possible, from Lawfare such as has never been seen before, to costly and ridiculous Executive Orders on the Green New Scam and other money wasting Hoaxes," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. "Fear not, these 'Orders' will all be terminated shortly, and we will become a Nation of

Common Sense and Strength. MAGA!!!" said the president-elect. Trump issued the statement shortly before Congress certified his victory in the Electoral College — and after Biden, 82, banned drilling for oil and natural gas off most of America's coastline, with the total area covered by the order greater than the land of Alaska and Texas combined. Biden announced earlier Monday he would block new drilling off the entire East Coast, as well as California, Oregon and Washington state, and block some drilling off Alaska's coast in portions of the Northern Bering Sea and in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Biden made the move just two weeks before Trump, who has promised to promote domestic energy production, is sworn in. Trump vowed to undo Biden's recent executive orders, though it's unclear if he would be able

to reverse the decision to block oil drilling, considering he was blocked in 2019 when he tried to reinstate drilling in areas blocked off by former President Barack Obama. Despite Trump's assertion that Biden's White House has not been helpful during the transition, his incoming chief of staff Susie Wiles has said otherwise. She told in an interview published Monday the White House has been helpful during the transition process. "White House chief of staff Jeff Zients has been very helpful. He has made great suggestions, helped make sure we stay on time with required functions, helped us navigate the labyrinth that is the Executive Office of the President, and been very professional," she said. "He introduced me to the former chief of staff club" and even hosted a dinner (for Wiles and the former chiefs) at his beautiful home," Wiles added.

Trump Jr arrives in Greenland

PTI ■ NUUK (GREENLAND)

The eldest son of US President-elect Donald Trump arrived in Greenland on Tuesday for a private visit that has heightened speculation that the incoming US administration could seek to take control of the Danish territory. The Danish state broadcaster reported that Donald Trump Jr's plane landed in Nuuk, the capital of the vast and icy territory. Greenland's government said Trump Jr's visit would take place "as a private individual" and not as an official visit and that Greenlandic representatives would not meet with him. Míninguak Kleist, permanent secretary for the Greenland foreign affairs department, said that authorities were informed that Trump Jr would stay for about 4 to 5 hours.



Camels walk through snow during El Museo del Barrio's 47th annual Three Kings Day parade on Monday, in New York. AP/PTI

China shuts down Mt Everest scenic area after quake

PTI ■ BEIJING

China has closed for tourists the scenic areas of its side of Mt Everest, also known as Mount Qomolangma, following a 6.8-magnitude earthquake that jolted Dingri County in the Tibet Autonomous Region on Tuesday. Dingri is home to the base camp of the world's highest peak. According to local authorities, the staff and tourists were in safe condition after the quake, which hit the region at 9:05 am Tuesday (Beijing Time). The hotel buildings and surrounding areas in the scenic area have remained intact, state-run Xinhua news agency reported, citing the Dingri Culture and Tourism Bureau. However, the Qomolangma Station for Atmospheric and Environmental Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, located in Dingri, is experiencing a power outage. Despite this, the facilities have remained in good condition. Located at the China-Nepal border, Mount Qomolangma reaches an altitude of more than 8,840 metres, with its northern section located in Tibet referred to as Xizang by China.

Singapore passes law to protect scam victims

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore on Tuesday passed a new law providing the police with powers to order banks to restrict the banking transactions of potential scam victims. The Protection from Scams Bill comes as scams remain a "grave concern" in Singapore, said Minister of State for Home Affairs and Social and Family Development Sun Xueling as she tabled the Bill for a second reading in Parliament. "This Bill, passed unanimously, allows the police to act decisively and close a gap in our arsenal against scammers," Channel News Asia quoted the minister as saying in the House. The Bill will allow specified officers, including those from the police and Commercial Affairs Department, to issue restriction orders to banks if there is reasonable belief that account holders will be making transfers to scammers. These restriction orders will suspend money transfers, the use of ATM facilities and all credit facilities, although individuals will still be provided access to their monies for daily living expenses. "The intent is to buy the police more time to engage and convince the individual that he is being scammed, including through enlisting the help of his family members," Sun

told the House. She added that the restriction orders would involve the seven Domestic Systemically Important Banks (DSIBs) — DBS, OCBC, UOB, Citibank, HSBC, Maybank and Standard Chartered Bank — which account for the vast majority of consumer bank accounts in Singapore. The orders can also be issued to non-DSIB banks if there is reason to believe that victims will make transfers to scammers. Sun said the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is "mindful of the need to strike a balance between protecting an individual from further harm and not unduly inconveniencing him". Several safeguards are in place, such as requiring restriction orders be issued only "as a last resort if all other efforts to convince the individual have failed". Individuals can also appeal to the Commissioner of Police against the restriction orders - a process that MHA will ensure is expeditious, Sun added. The Bill will limit the duration of a restriction order to "a maximum of 30 days at the outset". Each order may be extended up to five times if the officer deems it necessary. After five extensions, the restriction order "must lapse... even if the victim is still at risk of transferring more money to the scammer," said Sun.

Planned trip to Kyiv by Trump's Ukraine envoy unlikely

PTI ■ KYIV

An upcoming trip to Kyiv by US President-elect Donald Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia has been cancelled but will be rescheduled, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Tuesday. The planned meetings between Keith Kellogg, a highly decorated retired three-star general who has long been Trump's top adviser on defence issues, and Ukrainian officials are "extremely important," Sybiha told reporters in the Ukrainian capital. "I am confident that this meeting will take place in its own time," he said during a news conference with his visiting Icelandic counterpart. "We are in contact to clearly define the timeline for its organisation and to ensure that the meeting is as meaningful as possible." Trump's arrival in the White House on January 20 injects another measure of uncertainty into how the almost 3-year-old war might unfold and whether it can end in the foreseeable future. Ukraine, up against a larger enemy, Russia, relies on Western — and especially US — military backing to keep fighting. But Trump has criticised the billions of dollars the Biden administration has spent on Ukraine. He has also said he could end the war in 24 hours, though he hasn't elaborated on how he might do that. Ukrainian officials are eager to sway Trump on sticking with Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has praised Trump's "strength" and said the American president's "unpredictability" could work in Ukraine's favour. Ukrainians have expressed hope tinged with pragmatism about Trump's election victory last November. The war is draining the resources of both sides, though military analysts say the conflict is less sustainable for smaller Ukraine, and the war's recent trajectory has not been in its favour.

Seattle police officer who fatally struck Jaahnavi Kandula sacked

PTI ■ SEATTLE / NEW YORK

In a significant development, a Seattle police officer who killed Indian student Jaahnavi Kandula in January 2023 when the patrol vehicle he was driving struck her, has been fired from the police department, officials said. Kandula, 23, from Andhra Pradesh, was struck by a police vehicle driven by Officer Kevin Dave when she was crossing a street in Seattle on January 23, 2023. He was driving 74 mph (more than 119 km/h) on the way to a report of a drug overdose call. Kandula was thrown 100 feet when she was struck by the speeding police patrol vehicle. According to a report in The Seattle Times on Monday, Interim Seattle Police Chief Sue Rahr said that she had fired Dave from the Seattle Police Department. The report, citing an email sent by Rahr to employees, said she fired Dave on Monday after the Seattle Office of Police Accountability found he had violated four department policies. "I believe the officer did not intend to hurt anyone that night and that he was trying to get to a possible overdose vic-



tim as quickly as possible," Rahr said. "However, I cannot accept the tragic consequences of his dangerous driving. His positive intent does not mitigate the poor decision that caused the loss of human life and brought discredit to the Seattle Police Department," according to the Seattle Times report. It added that the policies Dave failed to follow "include using emergency lights for an emergency response and being responsible for safely operating a patrol vehicle," according to the copy of Rahr's email. The development comes months after another Seattle police officer Daniel Auderer was fired following his insensitive comments and laughter after Kandula's death. The Consulate General of India in Seattle had been working consistently with authorities and law enforcement officials to ensure justice in the case, with Auderer's firing and now the action against Dave bringing a sense of closure and justice for Kandula's family. The Consulate had been in regular touch with Kandula's family representatives and had said that it would continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Jaahnavi and her family. In a February 2024 post on X, the Indian Consulate in Seattle said that "On the recently released investigation report of the King County Prosecution Attorney on the unfortunate death of Jaahnavi Kandula, Consulate has been in regular touch with the designated family representatives and will continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Kandula and her family. "We have also raised the matter strongly with local authorities, including Seattle Police for appropriate redress. The case has now been referred to the Seattle City Attorney's office for review. We await completion of Seattle Police's administrative investigation and will continue to monitor progress on the case." Rahr was appointed as interim chief in May 2024 and in July last year, she had announced Auderer's firing. However, decision about Dave's action came in only now.

Jimmy Carter to be honoured in Washington, city where he remained outsider

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Nearly 44 years after Jimmy Carter left the nation's capital in humbling defeat, the 39th president returns to Washington for three days of state funeral rites starting on Tuesday. Carter's remains, which have been lying in repose at the Carter Presidential Centre since Saturday, will leave the Atlanta campus Tuesday morning, accompanied by his children and extended family. Special Air Mission 39 will depart Dobbins Air Reserve Base north of Atlanta and arrive at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, with a motorcade into Washington and the Capitol, where members of Congress will pay their respects at an afternoon service. Carter, who died December 29 at the age of 100, will then lie in state Tuesday night and again Wednesday. He then receives a state

funeral Thursday at Washington National Cathedral. President Joe Biden will deliver a eulogy. There will be the familiar rituals that follow a president's death — the Air Force ride back to the Beltway, a military honour guard carrying a flag-draped casket up the Capitol steps, the Lincoln catafalque in the Rotunda. There also will be symbolism unique to Carter: His hearse will stop at the US Navy Memorial, where his remains will be transferred to a horse-drawn caisson for rest of his trip to the Capitol. The location nods to Carter's place as the lone US Naval Academy graduate to become commander in chief. All of the pomp will carry some irony for the Democrat who went from his family peanut warehouse to the Governor's Mansion and eventually the White House. Carter won the presidency as the smiling Baptist and technocratic engineer

who promised to change the ways of Washington — and eschewed many of those unwritten rules ways when he got there. "Jimmy Carter was always an outsider," said biographer Jonathan Alter, explaining how Carter capitalised on the fallout of the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal that toppled Richard Nixon. "The country was thirsting for moral renewal and for Carter, as this genuinely religious figure, to come in and clean things up." From 1977 to 1981, Carter was the city's highest-ranking resident. But he never mastered it. "He could be prickly and a not very appealing personality" in a town that thrives on relationships, Alter said, describing a president who struggled with schmoozing lawmakers and reporters. The gatekeepers of Washington society never embraced Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, either, not quite

knowing what to make of the small-town Southerners who carried their own luggage and bought their clothes off the rack. Carter sold what had been the presidential yacht, a perk his predecessors had used to wine and dine Capitol power players. Early in Carter's presidency, Washington Post society columnist

Sally Quinn tagged the Carters and their West Wing as "an alien tribe," incapable of "playing the game." An elite Georgetown hostess herself, Quinn nodded to Washington's "frivolity" but nonetheless mocked "the Carter people" as "not, in fact, comfortable in limousines, yachts, or in elegant salons, in black tie" or with "place cards, servants, six courses, different forks, three wines ... and after-dinner mingling." He endured a rocky four years that left him without enough friends in the town's power circles and, ultimately, across an electorate that delivered nearly 500 Electoral College votes to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. Long after leaving office, Carter still bemoaned a political cartoon published around his inauguration that depicted his family approaching the White House with his mother, "Miss Lillian," chewing on a hayseed. Carter often flouted the ceremoni-

al trappings that have been on display in Georgia and will continue in Washington. As president, he wanted to keep the Marine Band from playing "Hail to the Chief," thinking it elevated the president too much. His advisers convinced him to accept it as part of the job. And the song played Saturday as he arrived at his presidential centre after a motorcade through his hometown of Plains and past his boyhood farm. He also never used his full name, James Earl Carter Jr, even taking the oath of office. His full name was printed on memorial cards given to all mourners who paid their respects in Atlanta. He once addressed the nation from the White House residence wearing a cardigan, now on display at his museum and library. His remains now at rest in a wooden casket being carried and guarded by military pallbearers in their impeccable dress

uniforms. "He was a simple man in so many ways," said Brad Webb, an Army veteran who came to honour the former president at his library, which is on the same campus as The Carter Centre, where the former president and first lady based their decades of advocacy for democracy, public health and human rights in the developing world. "He was also a complicated man, who took his defeat and did so much good in the world," said Webb, who voted for Republican Gerald Ford in 1976 and Reagan in 1980. "And, looking back, some of the things in his presidency — the inflation, the Iran hostages, the energy crisis — were really things that no president can actually control. We get to look back with some perspective and understand that he was an excellent former president but also had a presidency we can appreciate more than we did as it was happening."



Saudi Arabia presses Florida man to give up US citizenship over critical tweets

SAUDI ARABIA has forced a Florida retiree to try to renounce his American citizenship after jailing him over social media posts critical of the kingdom's crown prince, according to the man's son. The retiree, 74-year-old Saad Almadhi, is one of at least four dual Saudi-American nationals who accuse Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's government of pressuring them to give up their US citizenship, a US-based Middle East human rights group said. The alleged tactic by a key strategic partner of the US, which has not been previously reported, tracks with similar efforts to silence even mild criticism, including the threat of imprisonment and exit bans like the one that has kept Almadhi from returning to the US after being released from more than a year in a Saudi prison. "There are Saudi princes that come to the US for routine medical checkups, so why can't an American citizen return home for his health?" Ibrahim Almadhi said of his father. "It's all because we don't want to upset our ally's feelings," he said in an interview from Washington. "If this were Russia, Iran or North Korea, he would've been declared wrongfully detained months ago." The Saudi Embassy in Washington acknowledged receiving a request for comment on the allegations but did not otherwise respond. The Saudi government doesn't recognize dual citizenship. It regularly rejects criticism of its actions, saying they are part of a multiyear crackdown on cor-

ruption, terrorism and other security threats. The plight of the elder Almadhi and others could complicate US efforts to turn the page on tensions arising from the 2018 killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. President Joe Biden in his 2020 campaign vowed to make pariahs out of Saudi royals after US intelligence officials concluded that the crown prince authorized the killing of the US-based journalist inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The prince has denied any involvement. But once in office and confronted with a spike in gas prices that did lasting damage to support for Democrats, Biden softened his criticism. During a visit to Saudi Arabia in 2022, the president had an awkward fist bump with Prince Mohammed. Saudi-US relations are expected to warm further under President-elect Donald Trump, whose real estate empire and family have extensive business dealings with the world's top oil exporter. A retired project manager who immigrated to the US in the 1970s, Almadhi was arrested in Saudi Arabia in 2021, when he arrived on a planned two-week visit to see family. Saudi officials confronted him with tweets he had posted over the past several years in the US, including one about Khashoggi's killing and another on the crown prince's consolidation of power. Almadhi was quickly sentenced to more than 19 years in prison on terrorism-related charges stemming from the tweets. Saudi Arabia freed him after more than a year but imposed

an exit ban that keeps him from returning to his home in Boca Raton, near Miami. For months after his release, Almadhi received menacing phone calls from men his son alleges were agents of the feared intelligence police, whose job it is to root out threats to the kingdom's rulers. Then, last November, they summoned Almadhi to a villa in Riyadh, where he was promised the exit ban would be lifted if he renounced his American citizenship, his son said. Feeling helpless, Almadhi signed a document and followed instructions to try to return his American passport to the US Embassy, his son said. By law, Americans seeking to relinquish their citizenship must follow a lengthy process, and US officials must deem their actions voluntary. That had not happened in Almadhi's case, the State Department said, adding that he remains a US citizen and receives consular support. "The Department will continue to advocate for Mr. Almadhi with the Saudi government and hope he is soon able to rejoin his family in the United States," the agency spokeswoman said. Abdullah Alaoudh, a senior director at the Middle East Democracy Center, a Washington-based human rights group, said he knew of three other dual US-Saudi citizens who reported being pushed to give up their US citizenship. He said they were not activists or vocal critics of the Saudi government. Alaoudh said Almadhi's case appeared the most egregious: "They are kind of forcing him."

First bird flu death reported in US

PTI ■ NEW YORK The first US bird flu death has been reported — a person in Louisiana who had been hospitalized with severe respiratory symptoms. Louisiana health officials announced the death on Monday. Health officials have said the person was older than 65, had underlying medical problems and had been in contact with sick and dead birds in a backyard flock. They also said a genetic analysis had suggested the bird flu virus had mutated inside the patient, which could have led to the more severe illness. They have disclosed few other details about the person. Since March, 66 confirmed bird flu infections have been

reported in the US, but previous illnesses have been mild and most have been detected among farmworkers exposed to sick poultry or dairy cows. In two cases — and adult in Missouri and a child in California — health officials have not determined how they caught it. The origin of the Louisiana person's infection was not considered a mystery. But it was the first human case in the US linked to exposure to backyard birds, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Louisiana officials say they are not aware of any other cases in their state, and US officials have said they do not have any evidence that the virus is spreading from person to person.



In this photo released by Russian Orthodox Church Press Service, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill (left) and Russian President Vladimir Putin speak after the Christmas service in the Christ The Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Over 22,000 bureaucrats in Pakistan possess dual nationality: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD In a surprising development, a National Assembly (NA) panel was informed that over 22,000 bureaucrats in Pakistan possess dual nationality, raising concerns about national security. As the NA's standing committee on Interior met on Monday with Raja Khuram Nawaz in the chair, members sounded alarm over the practice and called for stringent measures to restrict the practice, especially for bureaucrats, judges and members of the parliamentarians, according to The Express Tribune newspaper. The meeting was deliberating on the proposed legislation that would grant Pakistani passports to citizens of countries with which Islamabad has bilateral nationality agreements.

During the meeting, it was also revealed that 22,000 bureaucrats hold dual citizenship. Committee member Abdul Qadir Patel expressed surprise that while members of the National Assembly and judges were prohibited from holding dual citizenship, bureaucrats were not. He proposed that the bill should include a provision to ensure that individuals with dual

nationality should not be appointed as bureaucrats. Patel also challenged the argument that politicians are not given dual citizenship due to the need to safeguard state secrets. Agha Rafiullah of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) demanded detailed statistics on Pakistani citizens holding dual nationality, including how many have renounced their foreign citizen-

ship and whether NADRA, the official registration body, possessed data on which countries these individuals were affiliated with. The committee member also raised concerns about the relaxation of dual nationality rules, citing the example of the chairman of NAB (National Accountability Bureau), the top anti-corruption body, reported the paper.

France marks 10 years since deadly Charlie Hebdo attacks

PTI ■ PARIS A decade after gunmen stormed the offices of satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in a deadly assault that shook France to its core, the nation is pausing Tuesday to honour the victims and grapple with the evolving challenges of free expression and terrorism. President Emmanuel Macron and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo are leading solemn tributes at the site of the attack, where 12 people, including some of France's most beloved cartoonists, were killed on January 7, 2015. Among those remembered was Ahmed Merabet, a police officer who was gunned down on the street while defending the newspaper. The massacre, carried out by two brothers claiming allegiance to al-Qaida, marked the start of a grim new era for France, with a wave of extremist violence pushing the country to reassess its security priorities and commitment to free speech. Speaking on the anniversary, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau painted a stark picture of France's current security landscape. "France has remained considerably, but the threat is still there," he warned in an interview with RTL, referencing both external dangers and a troubling rise in home-grown radicalisation. "It is now primarily endoge-

nous — young individuals radicalised through social media. Last year alone, our services foiled nine attacks, the highest number since 2017." Retailleau cited recent attacks at public gatherings in Germany and New Orleans as grim reminders of why France must maintain a "very high level of caution." The attack on Charlie Hebdo, carried out in retaliation for the newspaper's irreverent caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, ignited fierce global debates about the limits of free expression. In the days that followed, millions marched in solidarity, brandishing pens and signs declaring, "I am Charlie" — a rallying cry for press freedom and defiance against extremism. But 10 years on, the unity of that moment has splintered. French commentators say younger generations are increasingly critical of satire they see as divisive or insensitive, particularly toward marginalised communities. Charlie Hebdo itself remains unapologetic. Its 10th-anniversary edition features a cover cartoon of a reader perched on an AK-47, captioned "Indestructible." In an editorial, the magazine's director, Laurent Sourisseau, known as "Riss," defended the power of satire. "If you want to laugh, it means you want to live," he wrote.

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COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT OF IPIS: E-Tender No. SNT-42-LMG-2024-25. Dated: 31-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work.

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PROVISION OF DIFFERENT TYPE OF BONDS IN ALIPURDUAR DIVISION: Tender Notice No.: AP-EL-TRD-12-24-25. Dated: 01-01-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work.

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Duty cut on smartphone parts to hit electronics ecosystem: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Any reduction in the customs duty on smartphone parts in the forthcoming budget will harm India's developing component ecosystem, discourage investment, increase imports, and make local firms uncompetitive, potentially resulting in job losses, think tank GTRI said on Tuesday.

India's smartphone industry is a 'Make in India' success story, with 2023-24 production reaching USD 49.2 billion and exports at USD 15.6 billion, making smartphones the fourth-largest export after diesel, aviation fuel, and polished diamonds. However, a few industry groups are pushing for further import tariff cuts on smartphone components in the Union Budget for FY26. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) warns that this could harm India's growing local manufacturing ecosystem and long-term ambitions in electronics.

"Instead of cutting tariffs, GTRI recommends setting up component hubs near ports to reduce import delays and warehousing costs. This

approach, used by countries like Vietnam and China, would support local manufacturing and reduce import dependency," the think tank's founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Highlighting six key risks of reducing tariffs, he said any reduction would harm India's developing component ecosystem, discourage investment, and hurt the goal of self-reliance; and would not help pushing exports as current export schemes already allow duty-free imports for manufacturing exports.

He added that the country's success in smartphone manufacturing stems from policies promoting local production through tariffs, incentives, and phased programmes and cutting tariffs could weaken this framework.

"Lower tariffs could encourage unsustainable assembly-based operations, as seen in past policy failures. Besides, the mid- and low-end segments depend on local components and provide employment. Duty cuts would make local firms uncompetitive, resulting in job losses," he added.

He also said that the



electronics imports have risen significantly, and further tariff cuts would worsen this trend, increasing India's reliance on foreign suppliers. Tariffs were already reduced from 15 per cent to 10 per cent last year.

Explaining further, the GTRI said that out of USD 49.2 billion worth of production of smartphones last fiscal, premium phones account for about 20 per cent of production, mid-range 30 per

cent, and low-end 50 per cent. "Local components are used in 70 per cent of low-end phones, 50 per cent of mid-range phones, and only 5-30 per cent of premium phones. The rising use of local parts is driven by India's production of key components for mid- and low-end phones like printed circuit boards (PCBs), display modules, camera modules, battery packs, smart phone chargers and adapters, wiring harnesses,

microphones and speakers, SIM card holders, and USB connectors," it said.

However, the ecosystem is still developing and needs protection, and reducing import tariffs would allow duty-free imports, making it harder for local firms to compete and would force them to shut down, it said.

"This would discourage further investment in local manufacturing and undo the progress made under the Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP). It would harm not just the smartphone industry but the entire electronics sector, jeopardizing India's goal of becoming self-reliant in electronics production," it said.

It added that the mid-range and low-end smartphone segments, which heavily rely on locally produced components, provide significant employment opportunities.

"If import duties are reduced, local firms will struggle to compete with duty-free imports, leading to job losses. In contrast, countries like South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan have focused on developing specialised local ecosystems for high-value

components, which has helped them sustain their electronics industries and create long-term jobs," it said.

On imports, the GTRI said that India's electronics component imports are rising. It rose from USD 15.8 billion in FY19 to USD 34.4 billion in FY24.

Cutting tariffs further will increase this dependence on foreign suppliers, making India vulnerable to global supply chain disruption.

(Multi Modal international Cargo Hub and Airport at Nagpur), cancelling the award of contract to GMR Airports, had said the impugned judgment was based on sound reasoning and true analysis of facts and did not warrant interference.

"We are of the considered opinion that the findings recorded by the High Court allowing the writ petition are in accordance with law. Those findings do not suffer from any illegality, warranting interference by this court in exercise of the power under Article 136 of the Constitution. All these appeals are hereby dismissed," a bench of Justices Vineet Saran, since retired, and J K Maheshwari had said on May 9, 2022.

Rupee falls seven paise against USD



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee fell 5 paise to settle at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as higher crude oil prices and outflow of foreign funds continued to weigh on the local unit.

Forex traders said the rupee pared some of its intraday losses as the American currency retreated from its elevated levels. Moreover, the recovery in the domestic equity market also aided sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.77, touched the day's peak of 85.65 and hit an intraday low of 85.80 against the greenback. The unit settled at 85.73 (provisional) against

the dollar, registering a fall of 5 paise from its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee settled 11 paise higher at 85.68 against the dollar. During intraday, the unit had hit the lowest-ever level of 85.84 against the American currency.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on FII outflows and underlying strength in the US dollar amid expectations of no rate cut by Fed in January. However, any extended recovery in the domestic markets may support rupee at lower levels.

"Traders may take cues from ISM services PMI, trade balance and JOLTS jobs data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 85.50 to Rs 85.90," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.30 per cent lower at 107.92, amid disappointing US services PMI and factory orders data, while President-elect Donald Trump dismissed rumours over stringent trade tariffs.



Microsoft to invest USD three billion in India: Nadella

PTI ■ BENGALURU

IT major Microsoft will invest USD 3 billion in India for the expansion of cloud and AI infrastructure in the country, the company's chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said on Tuesday.

There is a fantastic momentum in India where people are pushing for a multi-agent kind of

deployment.

"I am really really excited to announce the single largest expansion we have ever done in India by putting USD 3 billion additional dollars to expand our Azure capacity," Nadella said.

He said that the company is doing a lot of regional expansions in India.

Nadella said that Microsoft's mission to empower every person and organisation in

India drives the company.

"To that end it is about being able to ensure that the human capital of this country is able to continue to scale, take advantage of immense opportunity and potential the technology has. That's why we are very excited to announce today our commitment, which we have always had, to train 10 million people around AI skills by 2030," Nadella said.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile retail sales grew 9 per cent year on year in 2024 riding on the back of robust demand for two-wheelers and passenger vehicles amid challenging business environment, dealers' body FADA said on Tuesday.

Overall vehicle registrations stood at 2,61,07,679 units last year as compared to 2,39,28,293 units in the 2023 calendar year, recording a growth of 9 per cent.

"Despite multiple headwinds in CY24, including heatwaves, elections at both central and state levels and uneven monsoon, the auto retail industry remained resilient," the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) President C S Vigneshwar said in a statement.

In the two-wheeler segment, improved supply, fresh models and strong rural demand propelled growth, though finance constraints and rising EV competition continued to pose challenges, he noted.



The passenger vehicle (PV) segment benefited from robust network expansion and product launches, albeit with margin pressures due to higher inventory, thus leading to a discount war towards the second half, Vigneshwar stated.

Commercial vehicle segment performance was subdued amid election-driven uncertainty and reduced infrastructure spending, he noted.

PV sales stood at 40,73,843

units last year, up 5 per cent compared to 38,73,381 units in 2023.

Two-wheeler sales rose 11 per cent year on year to 1,89,12,959 units in 2024 as against 1,70,72,932 units in 2023.

Three-wheeler registrations rose 11 per cent year on year to 12,21,909 units as against 11,05,942 units in 2023.

Tractor sales witnessed a 3 per cent year on year growth at 8,94,112 units while commercial vehicle sales

remained flat at 10,04,856 units in 2024.

On business outlook, FADA noted that in the two-wheeler segment, rising rural incomes, fresh model introductions and an eventual plateau in EV disruption could revitalise growth after years of sluggish demand.

The CV sector is looking for the momentum from infrastructure investments, stable credit availability and government incentives -- factors that could spark a healthy uptick in fleet renewals and expansions, it said.

Meanwhile, PV dealers anticipate strong consumer pull from new SUV launches and feature-rich EVs amid maturing ecosystem, FADA noted.

However, price-sensitive buyers and interest rate fluctuations remain watch points, it added.

"Overall, FADA remains optimistic that market recovery, coupled with strategic OEM support and policy-level clarity, will enable the automotive retail industry to end CY25 on a

robust note," it said.

In December 2024, automobile retail sales declined 12 per cent year on year to 17,56,419 units.

Two-wheeler registrations fell 18 per cent to 11,97,742 units as compared to 14,54,353 units in December 2023.

PV retail sales also dipped 2 per cent to 2,93,465 units last month as compared to 2,99,351 units in December 2023.

PV retails declined primarily due to high inventory levels following the festive season and aggressive discounting aimed at clearing stock, FADA noted.

Poor market sentiment, limited new model launches and intense price competition among co-dealers further impacted sales, it added.

Overall, despite certain headwinds, automotive dealers remain hopeful that steady product availability, strategic marketing and supportive government measures will sustain momentum in the near term, it added.

Government notifies procedure for export of certified organic products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has laid out a procedure for export of certified organic products, requiring mandatory certification under the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) for such shipments, according to a public notice.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in a public notice said that a product will be allowed to be

exported as "organic product" only when accompanied by a Transaction Certificate (TC) issued by a certification body accredited by the National Accreditation Body for such items under the NPOP of the Department of Commerce.

India has fixed a target of USD 2 billion exports for organic food products by 2030.

It added that exports of these goods shall only be certified as such if produced, processed, packed and labelled as per the



standards laid down in the NPOP.

"Procedure for export of certified organic products has been notified," it added.

The revised edition of the NPOP will come into force with effect from 180 days from January 5.

The commerce ministry's arm APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) has revised the NPOP's regulations to make it

more farmer-friendly and help India push exports of organic food products.

The National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) provides standards for organic production and procedure for accreditation of certification bodies.

The standards and procedures have been formulated in harmony with other international standards regulating the import and export of organic products.

During April-November this fiscal, these exports rose by about 40 per cent to USD 456 million. It was USD 495 million in 2023-24.

To promote Indian organic goods in the global markets, he said, APEDA is facilitating the participation of a number of companies in 'BioFach', which is the largest organic food trade fair in Nuremberg, Germany. The four-day fair will start from February 11.

Tata Elxsi and CSIR-NAL partner for air mobility



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Global design and technology services provider Tata Elxsi has inked an initial pact with CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (CSIR-NAL) for a strategic partnership in advanced air mobility amid a rapidly evolving market for unmanned aerial vehicles and urban air mobility globally, a statement said on Tuesday.

The partnership combines NAL's deep aeronautical expertise and Tata Elxsi's technological capabilities in electrification, AI/ML, sensor fusion, and certification processes to support global and Indian markets, it stated.

This partnership will

accelerate product development cycles for these sectors by providing access to advanced testing infrastructure, methodologies, and expertise, Tata Elxsi said.

The two partners, as per the statement, will jointly focus on technologies such as aerodynamic design, autonomous systems, and secure communications to address the unique needs of both manned and unmanned air mobility systems.

"We believe the future of aerospace innovation lies in technologies like UAVs and UAM. This strategic partnership with NAL combines our strengths to push the boundaries of

innovation and accelerate the development of next-generation air mobility solutions for our customers globally," said Manoj Raghavan, MD & CEO at Tata Elxsi.

Stating that India presents significant opportunities through initiatives like Make-in-India, indigenisation, and the growing demand for advanced air mobility solutions, Tata Elxsi said the partnership will contribute to building a robust ecosystem of precision manufacturing, component suppliers, and tool vendors.

This ecosystem aims to bring together key stakeholders to foster innovation, enhance scalability, and address the unique requirements of advanced air mobility systems, the company said.

"CSIR-NAL's deep expertise in aerospace research and testing, along with Tata Elxsi's advanced technology and design expertise, will help us develop innovative, scalable, and sustainable solutions that will shape the future of urban transportation," said Abhay A.

Lectrix delivers over one lakh meals on electric vehicles in just eight hours

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lectrix delivered 114,985 meals in just 8 hours using a fleet of Lectrix electric vehicles, including their latest scooter model, NDuro. This groundbreaking initiative, titled "1 Lakh Meals on Lectrix Wheels," was not just about numbers-it was a testament to the power of sustainable action to solve pressing global challenges.

In collaboration with social purpose organizations including Navodyam (an SDMC Trust initiative), the Robin Hood Army, and The Akshay Patra Foundation, Lectrix showcased how technology and sustainability can work together to solve real-world social problems.

This event earned a prestigious place in the Asia Book of Records and India Book of Records for the highest number of meals delivered via electric vehicles in 8 hours.

From 10 AM to 6 PM, the



capital city witnessed an extraordinary operation powered by Lectrix's vehicles. Speaking about the initiative, Pritesh Talwar, President of EV Business, Lectrix, said, "At Lectrix, we believe innovation should not only drive progress but also serve humanity and the planet. This initiative was about more than breaking records; it was about demonstrating how green technology can create meaningful change. By delivering over 1 Lakh meals using electric vehicles, we

proved that sustainability isn't just a goal-it's the future. We tested how, in the future, we could roll out EVs in a pandemic or emergency scenario and reach more than a lakh people in just a few hours in a sustainable way. We invite the world to join us in embracing this vision for a greener and more equitable tomorrow."

The operation began at Akshay Patra's four kitchens, where thousands of meals were prepared and dispatched to 11 strategically identified hubs across Delhi.

Market benchmarks rebound after a two-day decline

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensx and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday after a sharp decline in the previous two sessions, driven by intense buying in blue-chip stocks like Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and L&T amid a firm trend in global markets.

However, a decline in IT stocks ahead of the earnings season and a weak rupee against the greenback restricted the market rally, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensx climbed 234.12 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 78,199.11. During the day, it jumped 487.75 points or 0.62 per cent to 78,452.74.

The NSE Nifty gained 91.85 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,707.90.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Asian Paints, Nestle India, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro and Adani Ports were



among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, Zomato, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Infosys were among the losers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, and Shanghai settled in positive territory while Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading with gains in mid-session deals. US markets ended mostly higher on Monday.

The rupee fell 5 paise to settle at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,575.06 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.12 per cent to USD 76.21 a barrel.

AC Milan 3-2 win over Inter Milan in Italian Super Cup final

AP ■ RIYADH
It took exactly one week on the job for Sergio Conceicao to earn his first trophy as AC Milan's coach — with two comeback wins no less. Milan came back from two goals down to beat city rival Inter Milan 3-2 and win the Italian Super Cup on Monday. Rafael Leao came off the bench and played a part in all three of Milan's goals from Theo Hernandez, Christian Pulisic and Tammy Abraham. Conceicao was hired to replace the fired Paulo Fonseca last Monday and also led the Rossoneri to a comeback win over Juventus in the semifinals. So what changed with Conceicao? "We played with confidence, courage and hunger," Abraham said. "We're a

strong team." Added Pulisic, "He told us we need to have more hunger and that that's more important than tactics." After the semifinals, Conceicao was asked if he embraced his players. "I'm not so nice and I'm not someone who hugs," he said. "I'm not here to make friends, I'm here to win." But after the final, Conceicao was seen dancing with his players and smoking a cigar in the changing room. It was Milan's first trophy since winning Serie A in 2022; and eighth Super Cup title but first since 2016. Lautaro Martinez and Mehdi Taremi put Inter ahead with goals on either side of halftime. Leao then earned a foul that resulted in a free kick which Hernandez curled in around Inter's wall. Then Pulisic finished off a counterattack by shooting



through Augusto's legs on a play that began with Leao. For the third goal, Leao provided a through ball for Pulisic, who crossed to Abraham, who tapped into an empty net in stoppage time. The final was moments away from going to a penalty shootout, since there was not going to be any extra time according to the competition rules. "It's also our fault that Fonseca was fired," said Hernandez, who like Leao often clashed with Fonseca. "We didn't have much time to work together (with Conceicao) but it's gone well in that short span." It was the fifth time in the last seven years that the competition was played in Saudi Arabia, and the second year of an expanded four-team format. A throw-in led to Inter's opener as Taremi fed the ball inside the area to Lautaro, who cut back before shooting through Hernandez's legs on Inter's only real chance of the half. Taremi, who was playing in place of the injured Marcus Thuram, finished off a counterattack right after the break. Milan plays its first Serie A match under Conceicao against Cagliari on Saturday. The Rossoneri are in eighth place with only seven wins in 17 matches but will return to league action with much more confidence. Inter lost for only the third time this season across all competitions, and for the second time to Milan, which won the Serie A derby 2-1 in September. The Nerazzurri's other loss was to Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League. "Inter stopped playing when it was 2-0," Lautaro said. "You pay for that in games like these.

Djokovic says he still feels 'trauma' when he travels to Australia because of his deportation

AP ■ MELBOURNE
Novak Djokovic said he still feels "a bit of trauma" when he travels to Australia, stemming from his deportation in 2022 because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19. "The last couple of times that I landed in Australia, to go through passport control and immigration, I had a bit of trauma from three years ago," Djokovic said in an interview with Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper published Monday, ahead of the Australian Open. "And some traces still stay there when I'm passing passport control, just checking out if someone from immigration zone is approaching." Djokovic, who has won 10 of his 24 Grand Slam championships at Melbourne Park, continued: "The person checking my passport — are they going to take me, detain me again or let me go? I must



admit I have that feeling." Back in 2022, Djokovic sought, and initially obtained, an exemption that would allow him into the Australian Open — and the country — even though there were strict rules requiring shots to protect against the coronavirus. But after his flight landed, his visa was canceled and he was sent to an immigration hotel. A judge later reinstated the visa and ordered Djokovic's

release, ruling he wasn't given enough time to speak to his lawyers. Australia's immigration minister then took away the visa again, based on "public interest." Djokovic's appeal of that ruling was denied by a three-judge panel, and he was deported. He faced a possible three-year ban from the country as someone whose visa was revoked, but Australia had a change of government, its pandemic border rules

changed and a new immigration minister granted Djokovic a visa in 2023 — when he went on to claim the trophy. "I don't hold any resentment, to be honest," Djokovic told the Herald Sun about the saga. "I don't hold a grudge." The Australian Open begins Sunday (Saturday EST), and Djokovic will be pursuing his 11th trophy in Melbourne to add to his men's record and an unprecedented 25th major singles title overall. A year ago, Djokovic lost in the semifinals to eventual champion Jannik Sinner. "I just hope to, before I retire, get at least one more title there," said the 37-year-old Djokovic, whose only triumph at a tournament in 2024 was his singles gold medal for Serbia at the Paris Olympics in August. Djokovic opened 2025 at the Brisbane International last week, losing in the quarterfinals to Reilly Opelka.

Cameron Norrie accidentally hits spectator with thrown racquet at Auckland ATP event

AP ■ AUCKLAND
British tennis star Cameron Norrie apologized and avoided disqualification when a racquet he tossed in the air struck a spectator at the ATP Tour tournament in Auckland on Tuesday. Auckland-born Norrie was facing match point against Facundo Diaz Acosta of Argentina when he lightly tossed his racquet into the air. The racquet struck a woman in a court-side box who was unhurt. Norrie received a warning from the chair umpire and went on to lose 6-2, 6-3 in the first round of the tournament. He reached the final in Auckland in 2023. "I wasn't meaning to do that but it's still not ideal to be doing that and I've never done something like that," Norrie said. (The spectator) "was laughing and I just said so sorry, I didn't mean to do



that.' And she said yeah, I'm completely OK." "That was not a big deal. But as we saw with some other players, you can easily be defaulted if it catches them in the wrong spot or they're not looking or something. "I was not meaning to do that and it is completely not me to do something like that. I apologized very quickly and I want to apologize in general. I'm not happy with how I behaved." Novak Djokovic was

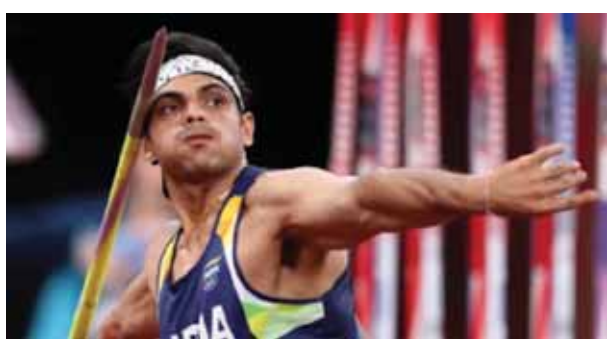
disqualified from the 2020 US Open after accidentally hitting a line judge with a ball and at the 2023 French Open Miyu Kato and Aldila Sutjiadi were defaulted from the women's doubles after a ball hit by Kato struck a ball girl. Also in 2023, Australian tennis player Marc Polmans was defaulted from the final round of qualifying at the Shanghai Masters after hitting a ball into the face of the chair umpire.

Malaysia Open: Treasa-Gayatri pair makes pre-quarters

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR
India's women's doubles duo of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand easily overcame the challenge from O r n n i c h a Jongsathapornpan and Sukitta Suwachai, beating the Thai pair in straight games in the opening round of the Malaysia Super 1000 tournament here on Tuesday. The Indian pair, seeded sixth here, won 21-10, 21-10 in just 30 minutes to secure a place in the round of 16. On a high following their success in the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournament in Lucknow, Treasa and Gayatri faced little challenge from the unseeded Thai pair taking a 17-8 lead in no time. The second game saw the Thai pair go neck-and-neck till 8-all before Treasa and Gayatri ran away with the game and the match.

India to host top javelin competition with Neeraj and best in world competing later this year

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH
Olympic gold and silver medalist Neeraj Chopra will headline a star-studded global javelin competition which India will host most likely in September, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) announced on Tuesday. This event is in addition to a slew of competitions India has expressed its interest to host, including the marquee 2029 World Championships. Outgoing AFI president Adille Sumariwalla confirmed that India has expressed interest to host the 2029 World Championships, as well as the 2027 World Relays. The AFI has already submitted its expression of interest to host the 2028 World Junior Championships when the international body chief Sebastian Coe visited the country in November last. "There will be a top javelin competition in India in which the top-10 javelin throwers in the world will compete. This will be an invitation tournament to be held later



this year," Sumariwalla, whose 12-year tenure as AFI chief ended on Tuesday, said on the first day of the AFI Annual General Meeting (AGM). "Neeraj Chopra will be there. He is part of the team that is organising the event, along with JSW, a foreign firm and the AFI are together creating this competition. This is being done as there is so much interest in javelin with August 7 -- when Chopra won the Tokyo Olympics gold -- being observed as National Javelin Day." Sumariwalla later told PTI that the event is most likely to be held in September.

Just before the start of the AGM, 2002 Asian Games shot put gold medalist Bahadur Singh Sagoo was elected unopposed as the new AFI chief. Talking about the big global events India is hoping to host in the next four years, Sumariwalla said, "Bids are open at the moment for (2028) World Junior Championships, 2029 World Championships, World Relays (2027) and India is going to bid for all of them. We have put in our expression of interest and so the process has started." "We might also do a World Half Marathon," he said.

Over 300 athletes to participate in Boccia nationals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Over 300 athletes from across the country will participate in the 9th Boccia Sub-Junior, Junior and Senior National Championship, scheduled to be held at the Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone in Visakhapatnam from January 8 to 14. The championship, held annually, provides a platform for athletes with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and other locomotor disabilities to demonstrate their skills, resilience, and determination. The primary goal of the championship is to prepare athletes for events such as the Paralympic Games and to amplify awareness about the capabilities of differently-abled individuals, said Boccia Sports Federation of India (BSFI) chairman Ashok Bedi. "The event highlights India's dedication to fostering inclusivity in sports and creating opportunities for athletes with disabilities to excel. It represents a significant step in India's journey as a developing nation



toward fostering equality in sports," Bedi said. Boccia, a precision ball game, has been recognised as a Paralympic sport since 1984. Played individually, in pairs, or in teams, the sport requires strategic thinking, precision, teamwork, and discipline. India is making significant strides in creating platforms for differently-abled athletes to shine on the national and international stage, and Boccia has become a symbol of empowerment, providing opportunities to athletes to represent the country in global competitions like the Paralympics. "The sport is not just a game but a movement that inspires hope, resilience, and equal opportunity for all," Bedi said.

China's most successful club folds under weight of debts

AP ■ GUANGZHOU
Guangzhou FC, the most successful soccer club in Chinese history, disbanded on Monday due to crippling debts. The club, formerly known as Guangzhou Evergrande, has been unable to meet the Chinese Football Association's financial entry requirements needed to compete in the 2025 domestic season. "Due to heavy financial burdens resulted from previous seasons, the club could not pay off all the debt by the deadline," Guangzhou said in a statement. "We express our sincere apology to all the supporters from across the community and we appreciate the understanding and forgiveness of all the fans very much." After being taken over by property developer Evergrande in 2010, the club started the spending spree in China that made headlines around the world. Helped by players such as Brazilian international



Paulinho and elite coaches such as Marcello Lippi of Italy and Brazil's Luiz Felipe Scolari, Guangzhou won eight Chinese Super League titles from 2011 to 2019. The team triumphed also won the Asian Champions League in 2013 and 2015. Other clubs followed with world-famous stars such as Carlos Tevez, Nicolas Anelka, Oscar, Didier Drogba and others heading to China. In 2021 however, Evergrande reported debts of over \$300 billion and, as key players left the club due to financial issues, it was relegated to China's

second tier in 2022. On the same day, Chinese Super League club Cangzhou Mighty Lions also announced its disbandment, as did third tier club Hunan Billows. "Only by setting sights on the long term, keeping the financial operation in a healthy status and investing in youth with patience should clubs build a robust future," the Chinese Football Association said in a statement, adding that 49 teams had been deemed financially ready to compete in the top three tiers of the league system in 2025.

Former Aston Villa forward Vassilev on US roster ahead of friendlies against Venezuela, Costa Rica

AP ■ CHICAGO
Former Aston Villa forward Indiana Vassilev was picked Monday for a U.S. Training camp ahead of friendlies against Venezuela and Costa Rica and is among 10 players who could make their national team debuts. The Vassilev made his first Aston Villa appearance on Jan. 4, 2020, against Fulham in the FA Cup and his Premier League debut 14 days later against Brighton. At 18 years, 11 months, 2 days, he became the second-youngest American to appear in the Premier League behind Jonathan Spector, who was 18 years, 5 months, 27 days in 2004. Walker Zimmerman and Jesús Ferreira, who haven't played

for the U.S. Since 2023, also are on coach Mauricio Pochettino's 24-man roster along with goalkeeper Zack Steffen, who last appeared for the national team in March 2022. Other veterans include 37-year-old defender Tim Ream, who captained the Americans in Pochettino's first four games, along with defenders Miles Robinson and Shaq Moore. No Europe-based players are on the roster for the games against Venezuela on Jan. 18 at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Costa Rica four days later at Orlando. The matches are not on FIFA international fixture dates. Europe-based players will return for the CONCACAF Nations League semifinal match against Panama on

March 20. Born in Savannah, Georgia, to parents of Bulgarian heritage, Vassilev played at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida, and signed with Aston Villa in 2018. He played for the U.S. Alongside Josh Sargent and Tim Weah at the 2017 Under-17 World Cup. Vassilev made four Premier League appearances for Aston Villa in 2019-20 but didn't appear with Villa's first team after that season. He spent time on loan with third-tier club Burton Albion and fourth-tier club Cheltenham Town, then was loaned to MLS's Inter Miami in July 2021 and was acquired by St. Louis after the 2022 season. Zimmerman, 31, hasn't played for the national team



since the CONCACAF Nations League final against Canada on June 18, 2023,

and Ferreira, 24, since the CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinal match against

Panama on July 12, 2023. The 29-year-old Steffen was a surprise cut from the 2022 World Cup roster by coach Gregg Berhalter and hasn't played for the U.S. Since the World Cup qualifiers in March 2022, he returned to the roster after Pochettino replaced Berhalter but Matt Turner started all four matches in October and November. Twenty-three players are from MLS and the roster includes Matko Miljevic, a 23-year-old midfielder who is among the players who could make debuts. Miljevic, who spent last year with Argentine club Newell's Old Boys, appeared with the U.S. Under-20 team in 2020 and also is eligible to play for Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia.

When Miljevic was with Montreal, MLS announced on Sept. 18, 2023, that his contract was terminated "for engaging in conduct detrimental to the league and violating his standard player agreement." MLS did not announce any details. In addition to Vassilev and Miljevic, defender George Campbell, midfielders Max Arfsten and Emeke Eneli, and forwards Patrick Agyemang and Brian Gutiérrez will be attending their first U.S. National team camp. Three others who have attended prior camps could make debuts: goalkeepers Drake Callender and Matt Freese, and forward Caden Clark. **The roster:** Goalkeepers: Drake

Callender (Miami), Matt Freese (New York City), Patrick Schulte (Columbus), Zack Steffen (Colorado) Defenders: Max Arfsten (Columbus), George Campbell (Montreal), DeJuan Jones (Columbus), Shaq Moore (Dallas), Jalen Neal (Montreal), Tim Ream (Charlotte), Miles Robinson (Cincinnati), John Tolkin (New York Red Bulls), Walker Zimmerman (Nashville) Midfielders: Benjamin Cremaschi (Miami), Emeke Eneli (Salt Lake), Diego Luna (Salt Lake), Jack McGlynn (Philadelphia) Forwards: Patrick Agyemang (Charlotte), Caden Clark (Montreal), Jesús Ferreira (Dallas), Brian Gutiérrez (Chicago), Matko Miljevic (no club), Indiana Vassilev.

Rohit and Kohli's Test future depends on selectors: Gavaskar

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's Test future is now in the hands of selectors, said former India captain Sunil Gavaskar while advocating an honest deep-dive into the team's downward spiral in the last six months. In an interview to PTI, Gavaskar spoke about India's recent debacles, including the home whitewash by New Zealand, the way forward and the responsibility on the Ajit Agarkar-led national selection committee to give a fair chance to those waiting in the wings. Asked about the raging debate surrounding the future of struggling stars Rohit and Kohli, Gavaskar said, "How long they continue is really up to the selectors." "Now that India has failed to qualify for the WTC (World Test Championship) final, it would be pertinent to reflect on the reasons that (why it) happened," he added.

This is the first time since the WTC's inception that India could not make the finals following a 1-3 loss to Australia in the Border-Gavaskar series that concluded on Sunday. That defeat also meant that the coveted BGT was surrendered to Australia for the first time in a decade. The primary reason for the debacle was the batting unit's failure to fire with Rohit and Kohli proving to be the weakest link. Kohli scored 190 runs in nine innings including an unbeaten century, while Rohit's tally was a dismal 31 from five completed knocks. Gavaskar didn't mince words while pointing out the repeated failures of the team's batters, who failed to cross the 200 mark six out of nine times during the series. "It is clear that in the last six months, the batting failed and that was the main reason that we lost matches that we should have won," the former captain stated. "So, if changes are required for the new cycle of the WTC which



starts in mid-June in England, then hopefully the selectors will take into account who would still be there for the final in 2027 and choose accordingly," Gavaskar put things perspective. Time for next crop to step up The 75-year-old former India captain did not take names but said there are some good performers coming up in the domestic circuit and the onus is now on the selectors to give them a fair chance. "Unless they are given a chance how will we know if those doing well in Ranji Trophy will do well at the international level? Here's where good selections come in," he said. Gavaskar also complimented the selection committee for unearthing a talent like Nitish Kumar Reddy, who was one of India's three centurions in the just-concluded tour, others being Yashasvi Jaiswal and Kohli. "Compliments to Ajit Agarkar and his team for seeing the potential in Nitish Kumar Reddy and picking

him for the Test squad too," he said of the player, who also enjoys strong backing of head coach Gautam Gambhir. On the bowling front, Gavaskar said India has enough talent that needs to be given the requisite opportunities to ensure that a generational star like Jasprit Bumrah is not overburdened. Once again, he refrained from taking names of the potential candidates, who would shape the bowling attack going forward. "India has got loads of promising pacers who are waiting for an opportunity. Yes, Bumrah should not be overburdened and if others step up then we can have an attack that can win matches in any conditions," he said. "Be honest" The culture of putting stars at a pedestal has been an oft-stated problem in Indian cricket. But Gavaskar said it is not very difficult to stay grounded even with that if one is capable of taking an honest look at performances.



Whitewash at home bigger failure than BGT loss: Yuvraj

PTI ■ DUBAI

World Cup-winning former all-rounder Yuvraj Singh has said that being whitewashed at home by New Zealand was a bigger low for Team India than the loss of Border-Gavaskar Trophy but refused to join the chorus of criticism against embattled veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. India has endured a difficult last few months in the five-day format, going down 0-3 to an under-strength New Zealand at home, which was a first in the team's Test history. This was followed by a 1-3 drubbing by Australia in the away edition of the Border Gavaskar series. Both the debacles have been largely attributed to the team's batting frailties, especially those of Rohit and Kohli. "According to me, losing (to) New Zealand is more hurting (sic). Because they are losing 3-0 at home. You know, that is not acceptable. This (losing BGT) is still acceptable because you have won two times in Australia. And this time you lost," Yuvraj told "PTI Videos" in an interview here. "Australia has been a dominant side for the last so many years, that is my thought," the 43-year-old hero of India's 2011 World Cup triumph said. While Kohli managed at least a hundred during the series despite continuing to be dismissed whenever he was

baited outside the off stump, Rohit was worse with a tally of just 31 runs and had to drop himself from the final Test. But Yuvraj said it is unfair to lambast the duo given their past achievements. "We are talking about our greats, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, we are saying very bad things about them," he said. "...People forget what they have achieved in the past. They are one of the greatest cricketers of this time. Okay, they lost, they did not play good cricket. They are getting hurt more than us," he added. Hopeful that India would bounce back strongly, Yuvraj said he has full faith in not just Rohit and Kohli but also new head coach Gautam Gambhir, who was his former teammate as well. "I feel that Gautam Gambhir as a coach, Ajit Agarkar as a selector, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, they are the best minds in cricket right now," he asserted. "And they have to decide what's the way for Indian cricket in future," he said. The big-hitting former batter also lauded Rohit for dropping himself from the Sydney Test, saying it was a selfless act. "I think it is a big thing. I have never seen in the past that the captain's form is not going well and he himself has gone out. And this is Rohit Sharma's greatness that he has kept the team ahead of himself," Yuvraj said.

England urged to boycott Champions Trophy game against Afghanistan by UK politicians

AP ■ LONDON

England should refuse to play the Champions Trophy cricket match against Afghanistan next month according to a letter signed by more than 160 U.K. politicians. The politicians want the England and Wales Cricket Board to take a stand against the Taliban regime's assault on women's rights and boycott the men's one-day international against Afghanistan in Lahore, Pakistan, on Feb. 26. Female participation in sport has effectively been outlawed since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, a move that puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board in contravention of International Cricket Council rules.

Because Afghanistan's men are still allowed to compete by the ICC, a strongly worded letter has emerged from the U.K. Parliament pleading for the ECB to make its own moral objection. Penned by Labour MP Tonina Antoniazzi and signed by a cross-party group from the House of Commons and House of Lords including Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn, it raises the "insidious dystopia" unfolding in Afghanistan. The statement, addressed to ECB chief executive Richard Gould, concludes: "We strongly urge the England men's team players and officials to speak out against the horrific treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban. "We also urge the ECB to consider a boycott of the upcoming match against Afghanistan... To send a clear signal that such grotesque abuses will not be tolerated. "We must stand against sex apartheid and we implore the ECB to deliver a firm message of solidarity and hope to Afghan women and girls that their suffering has not been overlooked." Gould issued a swift response,

reaffirming ECB principles while suggesting it favoured a uniform approach from all member nations rather than acting alone. "The ECB strongly condemns the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime," he said. "The ICC constitution mandates that all member nations are committed to the growth and development of women's cricket. In line with this commitment, the ECB has maintained its position of not scheduling any bilateral cricket matches against Afghanistan. "A coordinated, ICC-wide approach would be significantly more impactful than unilateral actions by individual members.

We know how to beat Aussies: Rabada

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Fiery South African pacer Kagiso Rabada, no stranger to beating Australia, believes the prospect of facing them in the World Test Championship final at Lord's in June has already sparked anticipation and motivation in his side. Reigning champions Australia secured their spot in the WTC final with a six-wicket victory over India in the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Sydney, clinching the series 3-1. South Africa were the first team to qualify after defeating Pakistan by 10 wickets in the Boxing Day Test. "It's actually quite some distance away, but a big occasion like the World Test Championship final gets you up for it," Rabada said on SuperSport after taking a six-



wicket haul in his side's 10-wicket, second-Test demolition of Pakistan that

completed a 2-0 sweep. Up against defending champions Australia, the Proteas will start as underdogs but Rabada, who twice played a big part in winning series against Australia in 2016-17 and 2017-18, is confident of pulling off an upset. "South Africa versus Australia has always been an intense rivalry, because we play cricket quite similar. We play hard -- and they're going to come hard at us, and we know that. But we also know how to beat them," he said. About the significance of Test cricket, Rabada said: "One hundred per cent, Test cricket

is still alive. It's our best format that we've been playing right now. "When you look at South African cricket and all our legends, they've all been great Test cricketers. The world's best players are Test cricketers, and this series against Pakistan has been a wonderful advertisement for Test cricket, especially in South Africa." The Proteas don't have any Test assignment in the build-up to the WTC Final at Lord's from June 11-16 and coach Shukri Conrad has said they're looking at the possibility of a one-off match against either Ireland or Afghanistan.

Don't feel I was in race for opener's slot in Border-Gavaskar Tests: Renshaw

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian Test batter Matt Renshaw said on Tuesday that he had no idea if he was in the race to replace retired opener David Warner in the recently-concluded Border-Gavaskar series against India, which the hosts won 3-1. Several names, including Cameron Bancroft, Marcus Harris, Nathan McSweeney, Sam Konstas and Renshaw, were discussed by Cricket Australia as potential options for opening the innings. McSweeney and Konstas made it to the playing XI, with the former playing the first three Tests and the latter getting included in the last

two. Renshaw felt he figured way down in the Australian selection pecking order for the opener's slot. "I probably wouldn't say that I got caught up in the opener race. I don't think I was in it at all," Renshaw told SEN Radio. "I'm probably further away than a few of the boys (to be selected) but most of my Tests have been in Asia so I've got a fair bit of experience there if called upon," added Renshaw, who would be fancying his chances as Australia select the squad for the Test series against Sri Lanka later this month.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Biranchi Narayan Behara, S/o - Late Dhruba Charan Pattnaik, resident of At/Po-Santhapada, Ps- Talcher, Dist- Angul, Odisha, PIN-759104 declare by this affidavit No. 01, dtd- 03.01.2025 that now onwards I shall be known as BIRANCHI PATTANAIK for all future purposes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, SEPHALI MUDULI, is legally wedded, spouse of Army No. 4285080A, Dipak Kumar Jena at Kimbiriya Pal, PO- Udayapur, PS- Bari, Dist- Jaipur, State of Odisha-755017, do hereby solemnly affirm vide affidavit/Self Declaration dated 03.01.2025 state on oath as follows:-That I have changed my name from SEPHALI MUDUULI And SEPHALI DIPAK JENA to SEPHALI MUDULI due to correct name in my PAN and Aadhar Card. That all names SEPHALI MUDULI, SEPHALI MUDUULI & SEPHALI DIPAK JENA pertain to one and the same person.

MM-407
ବନ୍ଦୁକାମୀ ଚିକିତ୍ସା ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାପନା ଉପାଦେୟକରକ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାଳୟ, ରାଉରକେଲା
OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER CUM WILDLIFE WARDEN
ROURKELA FOREST DIVISION, ROURKELA, SUNDARGARH, ODISHA
Phone No. 0661-2664637, Fax No. 0661-2664639, e-mail: dfo.rourkela@odisha.gov.in
SHORT TENDER NOTICE
Tender No. 12 /2024-25 Dated:- 06.01.2025.
Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites sealed tenders from reputed intending Manufacturing Firms/ Dealers/ Suppliers having valid GSTIN and PAN Registration No. Procurement of Three (03) numbers UAV (DRONE) with battery combo pack (Battery kit, Speaker and RTK module). The tender papers with detailed terms and conditions will be available in the website www.sundargarh.odisha.gov.in / www.odishaforest.in and in the Office of DFO, Rourkela on payment of Rs. 1,000/- (One thousand) only in cash or Account Payee Bank Draft in favour of Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division during office hours from 09.01.2025 to 20.01.2025 latest by 05.00 PM by Speed Post/ registered post/ by hand only. The tender will be opened in the office of the undersigned on 22.01.2025 at 11.30 AM. Post/Courier: (Near Hockey Chowk) Rourkela PIN-769004. Email-id: dforourkela@yahoo.co.in Divisional Forest Officer Rourkela Forest Division OIPR-09044/11/0019/2425

Government of Odisha "e" procurement Notice
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,
RURAL WORKS ELECTRICAL DIVISION, SAMBALPUR.
E-mail - cerwelectricaldivn.sambalpur@gmail.com
Bid Identification No. EE/RWELECT/SBP/22/2024-25
1. Name of the work :- 1. Shifting for construction of HL Bridge over under Nallah at 1.8 KM on Sreikela to Sangamunda Road Under R.W.E.S, Bolangir
2. Estimated Cost :- 1.Rs. 6,98,068.00/- 2. Rs. 11,09,390.00/-
3. Availability of bid document :- 11:30 Hours of 09.01.2025 to 17:00 Hours of 18.01.2025
4. Date of Opening of Tenders :- 11:30 Hours on dt. 20.01.2025
Further details and any corrigendum/Addendum/cancellation of tender can be seen from the Web Site www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
Executive Engineer
R.W Electrical Division Sambalpur
OIPR-34175/11/0010/2425

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, BEGUNIA
"e" Procurement Notice
1. Name of the Work :- 1. Construction of office building & 50 mt godown at Jageswari PACS, Haja GP
2. Construction of office building & 50 mt godown at Podahiha PACS, podahiha GP
3. Construction of office building of the PACS at Dingar, Dingar GP
4. Construction of office building of the PACS at dalatola, Kunuri GP under Begunia Block as per DTCN
2. Total Number of Works :- 04 No
3. Estimated Cos :- From Rs. 10,66,211.00 to Rs 24,36,695.00
4. Class of Contractor :- C,D & Equivalent
5. Period of Completion :- As per DTCN
6. Availability of Tender :- Online for bidding :- Dt. 08.01.2025 at 11.00 A.M to dt. 22.01.2025 at 5.00 PM
7. Last date & time of seeking :- Dt. 18.01.2025 at 5.00 PM
Tender clarification :- Dt. 24.01.2025 at 11 AM
Further details can be seen from the website www.tendrodisha.gov.in
Block Development Officer
Begunia
OIPR-19302/11/0005/2425

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
DHENKANAL (R&B) DIVISION, DHENKANAL
Email - cedklpvd@gmail.com
INVITATION FOR BIDS THROUGH e-Procurement
Bid Identification No. SE DKL (R&B) 29/ 2024-25
Invitation for Bids
1. The Superintending Engineer Dhenkanal (R&B) Division, Dhenkanal, on behalf of Governor of Odisha, invites percentage rate bids in single cover system in ONLINE MODE only, for Construction of Building work as detailed below.
2. Nature of work :- Civil (Building) Works
3. No. of work :- 02 Nos.
4. Bid Cost. :- ₹ 6,000/- each
5. Class of Contractor :- 'B' & 'C' Class
6. Availability of Bid Documents in the :- From 10.00 AM of 13.01.2025 to 5.00 PM of 27.01.2025
7. Date of Opening of Bid :- Dt. 28.01.2025 at 11:00 AM.
8. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website : <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website only.
Superintending Engineer
Dhenkanal (R&B) Division
OIPR-34016/11/0023/2425

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
Office of the Addl. Chief Engineer, Mechanical Circle, Bhubaneswar
Email Address: semechircircle104@gmail.com
e-Procurement Notice- Bid Identification No. - ACEM/MDL-32/2024-25
A-835
1. Name of the Work :- Mechanical Gate Works
2. No. of Works :- 01 (One)
3. Category of executors :- SSI Units registered under DIC/ NSIC/ MSME for Irrigation Shutters / Hydro mechanical gates.
4. Bid Identification No. :- ACEM/MDL-32/2024-25
5. Estimated Cost :- Rs. 17,48,628/-
6. Period of Completion :- 02 (Two) calendar months.
7. Date & time of availability of bid documents in the Portal :- From dt. 07.01.2025 (10.00 AM) to dt. 20.01.2025 (5.30 PM)
8. Last date/ time for receipt of bid :- dt. 20.01.2025 (up to 5.30 PM) In the Portal
9. Date and Place of opening of Bid :- dt. 21.01.2025 (12.00 Noon onwards in the O/O the undersigned)
10. Name of the Officer inviting bid :- Addl. Chief Engineer, Mechanical Circle, Bhubaneswar
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any further issue of Addenda/ Corrigenda/ Cancellation Notice shall be uploaded in the aforesaid website only.
Addl. Chief Engineer
Mechanical Circle Bhubaneswar
OIPR-32405/11/0032/2425

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
Office of the Addl. Chief Engineer, Mechanical Circle, Bhubaneswar
Email Address: semechircircle104@gmail.com
e-Procurement Notice- Bid Identification No. - ACEM/MDL-28/2024-25
A-831
1. Name of the Work :- Mechanical Gate Works
2. No. of Works :- 01 (One)
3. Category of executors :- SSI Units registered under DIC/ NSIC/ MSME for Irrigation Shutters / Hydro mechanical gates.
4. Bid Identification No. :- ACEM/MDL-28/2024-25
5. Estimated Cost :- Rs. 12,21,190/-
6. Period of Completion :- 02 (Two) calendar months.
7. Date & time of availability of bid documents in the Portal :- From dt. 07.01.2025 (10.00 AM) to dt. 20.01.2025 (5.30 PM)
8. Last date/ time for receipt of bid :- dt. 20.01.2025 (up to 5.30 PM) In the Portal
9. Date and Place of opening of Bid :- dt. 21.01.2025 (12.00 Noon onwards in the O/O the undersigned)
10. Name of the Officer inviting bid :- Addl. Chief Engineer, Mechanical Circle, Bhubaneswar
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any further issue of Addenda/ Corrigenda/ Cancellation Notice shall be uploaded in the aforesaid website only.
Addl. Chief Engineer
Mechanical Circle Bhubaneswar
OIPR-32405/11/0027/2425

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, CUTTACK
Letter No. 50 / Dt. 06.01.2025
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA e-Procurement Notice
Bid Identification No. on line SEC MID- 19 /2024-25
semidcuttack@yahoo.co.in
A-849
1. Name of work :- Construction of CDs in MI Sub-Division Tigiria.
2. Total Number of work :- 02 (Two) nos.
3. Estimated cost :- Varies from Rs. 49.90 to 40.26 lakhs
4. Tender paper Cost(Online) :- Rs. 6,000/-
5. Bid Security (Online) :- As per DTCN
6. Period of Completion :- As per DTCN
7. Availability of Bid Document :- From 09.01.2025, 10.00 AM to 22.01.2025, 5.00 PM in website (www.tendersorissa.gov.in)
8. Last date & Time of receipt :- 22.01.2025 at 5.00 PM through online Bid through online
9. Date of opening of Bid documents :- 24.01.2025 - at 11.00 A.M in the office of the SE, M.I. Division, Cuttack.
10. Date of Lottery, if required :- 28.01.2025 at 12.00 Noon in the office of the SE, M.I. Division, Cuttack
11. Name and address of the OIT :- Superintending Engineer, M.I. Division, Cuttack.
P.O :- Nayabazar, Cuttack.
Phone :- 0671-2443622
PINCODE :- 753004
Further details can be seen from the Government of Odisha Web-Site www.tendersorissa.gov.in
Superintending Engineer
M.I. Division, Cuttack
OIPR-32121/11/0021/2425